

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

DEVELOPING, PLANTING, AND MULTIPLYING AN ADVENTIST
HOUSE CHURCH USING PRINCIPLES OF MISSIOLOGY IN THE
FLORIDA CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

A Dissertation

Presented In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by

W. Milton Adams

October 2009

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ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

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Title: DEVELOPING, PLANTING, AND MULTIPLYING AN ADVENTIST HOUSE CHURCH USING PRINCIPLES OF MISSIONOLOGY IN THE FLORIDA CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

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Problem

Church attendance is steadily declining throughout North America. Nevertheless, people are still seeking God, but it is occurring outside the church walls. The same trend is occurring in Florida where church attendance is below the national average. In response to this trend this project was to establish an Adventists house church within the Florida Conference of Seventh-day Adventists to assess a house church model's front-line missionary viability.

Method

Following pre-launch work, one house church was launched in the North West

Orlando area with two families (four adults and five small children). The project was evaluated for health, using Natural Church Development, and for effectiveness of front-line missionary viability.

Results

Following ten months of work the following were observed: (1) average attendance was twenty-nine people (seventeen adults and twelve children); (2) thirty percent of adult attendance were unchurched people; (3) sixty-five percent of unchurched people returned a second time; (4) eight Adventist adults were trained to launch their own house church in a new location; (5) six baptisms were celebrated; (6) tithe and offerings totaled, \$47,469.79 (\$31,512.31 and \$15,957.48 respectively); (7) two new house church locations were launched; (8) total attendance, since inception, averages for each of the three locations was twenty people, totaling a weekly Simple Church attendance of sixty people; (9) the Florida Conference received 100 percent of tithe; (10) no financial support (i.e., pastor's salary) was received from the Florida Conference; and (11) approximately 90 percent of local offerings were used to help unchurched people and occasional emergency needs among house church participants.

Conclusions

House churches, specifically Simple Church, operate out of a decentralized, grass-roots paradigm that is faithful to the Seventh-day Adventist mission. This paradigm intentionally recaptures the New Testament and early Adventist roots by eliminating the professional clergy/lay person distinction. This elimination, in and of itself, naturally empowers lay-people to become Adventist front-line missionaries. Lay people realize that

if they do not become missionaries, there are no professional clergy or Bible workers to whom they can shift their missionary responsibility. This awareness both calls and invites lay people to step up to the plate and once again take ownership of the unique message God has invited Seventh-day Adventists to share with the world—beginning with their unchurched neighbors.

Future Development

The nature of this project carries with it ongoing development, change, and modifications. This project was officially completed March 31, 2009. Descriptions and explanations contained within this document are subject to change as the development of the Simple Church Network, which was the outcome of this project, continues to expand. Please contact the author by visiting <http://www.SimpleChurchAtHome.com> for update information on items found within this project dissertation.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AdCom	Administration Committee (Florida Conference of Seventh-day Adventists)
CPM	Church Planting Movement
DAWN	Discipling a Whole Nation, http://www.dawnministries.org
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic acid is the nucleic acid that contains the genetic instructions used in the development and functioning of all known living organisms and some viruses. For purposed in this document DNA refers to the genetic, learned, and socialistic patterns in a given context.
GCC	Georgia Cumberland Conference
G12	Groups of Twelve
IMB	International Missions Board, http://www.imb.org
LIFE	Lay Institute For Evangelism
NCD	Natural Church Development, http://www.ncd-international.org
<i>NIV</i>	<i>New International Version</i>
<i>NKJV</i>	<i>New King James Version</i>
<i>NLT</i>	<i>New Living Translation</i>
OLT	Overseas Leadership Team
SBC	Southern Baptist Convention

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Your Story Hour, who produced the George W. Carver story. Mariah Watkins tells little

George who had a thirst to learn, “Boy, you go and learn all you can, ya hear. Then you come back and teach your people.”

God, for Your faithfulness, to You be all the honor and glory.

CHAPTER 1

PROJECT INTRODUCTION

House Churches are a very old new idea. They comprise a rich history.

In today's world, when one hears about house churches, it is often in the context of persecution and most likely outside of the North American context. But as the reader will discover, the genesis of New Testament house churches pre-dates persecution.

In North America the concept of house churches has largely been unrecognized for the past 150 years, but that does not mean they have been non-existent. It has only been recently, since the early 1980s, that house churches have once again been the subject of attention.¹

This dissertation comprises six chapters. Chapter one will present a survey of possible background dynamics that have contributed to the declining church growth in Florida and in North America as described by a number of researchers. Chapter two, Biblical Foundations, will lay a biblical foundation for missional house churches. Chapter three, Literature Review, will survey characteristics of house churches and house church networks found in North America. Chapter four, Project Description, will describe the developments as we launched a house church in the Florida Conference of Seventh-day

¹Roger W. Gehring, *House Church and Mission: The Importance of Household Structures in Early Christianity* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 5.

Adventists. This chapter will also reflect the beliefs and values of this author. This author does not expect the reader to agree or embrace all or any of the beliefs or values set forth. But they will be evident, especially in chapter four's description and in chapters five and six, as the interplay of these values contributed to the project's development.

Chapter five, Evaluation and Reflection, highlights a number of items as this author reflects on this project. These reflections are forthright.

Chapter six, Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations, make suggestions in light of the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as it relates to a secularization of the North American culture.

Introduction

The intent of this chapter is to articulate and reflect on (1) some of the historical events that may have contributed to the current church growth difficulties we are facing in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Florida and throughout much of North America; (2) to state the problem this project will address; (3) to outline justification for this project; (4) to articulate the methodology; (5) to define terms; and (6) to describe project limitations.

Background to the Problem

Frank Viola observes, "When Christianity was born, it was the only religion on the planet that had no sacred objects, no sacred persons, and no sacred spaces."² Although

²Frank Viola and George Barna, *Pagan Christianity?* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2008), 12.

he does not address “sacred time,” seven pages later he does document that “in AD 321, Constantine decreed that Sunday would be a day of rest—a legal holiday.”³ In fact, in all of this author’s house church research, Viola is the only author who indirectly acknowledges the Sabbath to Sunday change.

Barth and Blanke would agree with Viola that prior to Constantine, “when Christianity was born,” there were no sacred objects, persons, or spaces when they say,

Following the evidence of Acts, the formation of house churches began in Jerusalem *even while Christians could still meet and publicly speak* in the precincts of the temple. But because they were excluded more and more from the temple and the synagogues, the early Christians were forced to follow the example given by Diaspora Jews who, if they could not build a synagogue and meet in it, assembled in private homes for worship.⁴

This is an important observation in the context of house church discussion. People often want to limit house churches to times of persecution.⁵ Barth and Blanke would accurately argue that house churches started prior to persecution. But since history records that persecution has often led to worship in house churches, it is tempting to think that house churches originally followed persecution.

Barth and Blanke go on to articulate that with the genesis of New Testament

³Ibid., 19.

⁴Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *The Letter to Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 261. (Italics supplied.)

⁵In the same way Adventists go back to Genesis to establish Sabbath and health guidelines; and in the same way they go back to Pentecost to establish speaking in tongues for missional purposes; this author would suggest that one must go back to New Testament (post resurrection) to establish the origin and development of house churches. In fact, when talking with house church leaders who are not Sabbath keepers, explaining Sabbath in the context of New Testament worship practices, where we find lay-leaders (as compared to professional clergy/priests), and house churches, meets with considerable acceptance. It gives authenticity and credibility to sharing the Sabbath.

house churches, they initially naturally followed the familiar house synagogue style.

These observations will be taken up in chapter two.

Constantine's Contribution

It is not possible, within the scope of this dissertation, to explore all the changes that Constantine made, nor the implications thereof. But three specific changes, and their interplay as they relate to each other, will be considered: (1) Sabbath to Sunday, (2) lay-led to professionalized priests/clergy, and (3) homes to public basilicas/cathedrals/churches.

The change from Sabbath to Sunday has been heavily researched and documented by Seventh-day Adventists. Readers who would like to explore a comprehensive work on historical changes should consult *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* by Samuele Bacchiocchi.⁶

The remaining two changes have gained notoriety by Christianity in relatively recent years. Most of this recognition has come from proponents of house church methodology.

The change from the lay-led to professional priests/clergy is fascinating. Wolfgang Simson chronicles the early development.

One of the first attempts at inventing the non-scriptural distinction between 'clergy' and 'laity' was made by the Nicolaitans, a group that emphasized the difference between 'the listening lay people and the ministering brothers'. They go back to Nicolas. . . . Nicolaitan in Greek is composed of two words. *Nikao* means to conquer, to be above others, and *laos* means common people. 'A Nicolaitan is someone

⁶Samuele Bacchiocchi, *A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1977).

conquering the common people, climbing above the laity,' says Watchman Nee in his book *The Orthodoxy of the Church*. 'The conduct of climbing over and above the common believers as a mediatorial class is what the Lord detests and hates.' The concept of a special clergy caste is already evident in the two letters of Clement of Rome, c. AD 100) and the elevation of the bishop to be the autocratic head of the local church in the letters of Ignatius of Antioch in Syria, (c.110-17).⁷

As one is beginning to see, there was not a clean-cut change. As with most changes, they developed over time.

Simson continues with this development.

When Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity in AD 312 and, in his Edict of Milan, made Christianity a state religion, Christians, tired of centuries of persecution, celebrated him as a savior, they relaxed—and they experienced probably the biggest single derailment in history. In the years after 312 the church became heavily professionalized; priests were approved and 'licensed' to conduct weddings and other functions in a more and more professional public manner, and the church experienced the doubtful blessing of being equipped with a mediatorial caste between itself and God. The church needed to be 'fit for the king' and his company, and that meant cathedrals not shabby houses. Thus, the great divide between clergy and laity not only emerged, but was sanctioned, institutionalized, sealed and protected by the state, an error that has cost the lives of millions of martyrs right up to the present day, killed by the hand of secular soldiers, at the instigation of 'properly organized and registered' advocates of Christendom.⁸

It is clear that laity were replaced with professional priests. Van Kicklighter confirms the monumental impact this change has had throughout history as he asks the question, "What is it about North America that makes it such a difficult place for the rapid spread of the Gospel?"⁹ Although he readily agrees there are a number of issues, he unapologetically says, "Perhaps none is more significant than the 'professionalization' of

⁷Wolfgang Simson, *Houses That Change the World* (Emmelsbull, Germany: C & P Publishing, 2004), 54.

⁸Ibid., 57.

⁹Daniel R. Sanchez, *Church Planting Movements in North America* (Fort Worth, TX: Church Starting Network, 2006), 471.

ministry that occurred over the last several generations.” It has already been established that this goes beyond “the last several generations.” Kicklighter would not disagree with this. “The development of a Christian clergy did not fully manifest itself until the third and fourth centuries. The term ‘priest’ was not conferred on Christian clergy until around AD 200.”¹⁰ Viola continues this line of thought, but adds an important observation. “Following the path of the pagans, early Catholicism adopted the practice of burning incense and having vestal (sacred) virgins. The Protestants dropped the sacrificial use of the Lord’s Supper, the burning of incense, and the vestal virgins, *but they retained the priestly caste (the clergy) as well as the sacred building* (italics supplied).¹¹

It may or may not be possible to determine which came first. Did the “sacred building” necessitate the need for the “priestly caste” or did a “priestly caste” lead the way for “sacred buildings?” Viola suggests that “sacred buildings” came first and led the way for a “priestly caste.”¹² In either case, it is evident that we have both. It is also agreed that church buildings began with Constantine.¹³ “Following Helena’s trip to Jerusalem in AD 327, Constantine began erecting the first church buildings throughout the Roman Empire, some at the public expense, nine of which were in Rome and many others in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Constantinople.”¹⁴

¹⁰Ibid., 475.

¹¹Viola, 13.

¹²Ibid., 17.

¹³Ibid., 18.

¹⁴Ibid., 21.

Although most scholars will not deny that Constantine is primarily responsible for this change, some scholars take up the question of whether the transition was abrupt or over an extended period of time.¹⁵ Regardless of a fast or slow change, Sanchez observes that the classical Constantine church structure to be “pastor + [public] building + programme = [real] church.”¹⁶

This Constantinian church equation summarizes possible factors contributing to the current conditions of church growth. Additionally, there are contributing factors that are unique to the Seventh-day Adventist Church to which we now turn our attention.

Adventist’s Contribution

Change happens slowly. Adventism is no exception. Russell Burrill, in his doctoral dissertation, now published as a book, says, “There does not seem to be any definitive action that switches the missional model of the early Adventist Church to the traditional model of modern Adventism. Instead, it seems to have been a gradual shift over several decades.”¹⁷ Change has happened and a “traditional model” has been adopted within Adventism. We will explore some of the elements of this “traditional model of modern Adventism.”

Much has been written in the past twenty years regarding the rise of settled pastors and the negative implication of this shift. A summary of this shift will be chronicled in

¹⁵For more information on this topic see Gehring, 11.

¹⁶Sanchez, 31.

¹⁷Russell Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life & Mission of the Local Church* (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Books, 1998), 170.

hopes of shedding light on the bigger shift whose genesis is with Constantine.

Adventist Roots

Methodism¹⁸ is often credited as the most influential denomination in shaping Adventism. Recognizing that many early Adventist pioneers came from the Methodist denomination, it is to be expected that they would naturally copy what they had seen.

“But the one that influenced them [early Adventists] most was *the most biblical*—the Methodist organization,” says Burrill. He then articulates what was “the most biblical.” “They developed a *lay-driven, non-clergy dependent, community-based church*” (italics supplied).¹⁹ This is a rather bold statement in suggesting that this model was “the most biblical,” a statement that this author has discovered is not a politically correct statement given Adventists current Constantine model, or what Burrill has called the “traditional model of modern Adventism.”

Highlighting the historical development of Methodism, Daniel Sanchez, quoting scholars Finke and Start, in his book *Church Planting Movements in North America* says, “The advance of Methodism slowed, and eventually halted, with ‘the loss of the circuit

¹⁸“Early Methodism developed all the essentials of relational small groups that met together regularly for mutual support and encouragement and to hold each other accountable for their life in Christ. The Methodist class meeting had all the elements of small group. This was *the first time since the apostasy of Constantine* and the establishment of the institutional church that a church which was built on relational small groups had gained such popular support. It must not be forgotten that much of Adventist ecclesiology was borrowed from the Methodist roots. Adventist conference organization is essentially Methodist in origin. Even the itinerant, circuit-riding preacher of early Adventism can be traced to Methodist roots.” Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach*, 147. (Italics supplied.)

¹⁹Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach*, 149.

riding preacher, a centralized church hierarchy, and *diminished role for the laity, full time clergy becoming normative*, increasing educational requirements, and rising affluence” (italics supplied).²⁰ Over time, Adventism seems to also follow this progression. Sanchez takes his conclusion one step further when he says, “The Methodists and Baptists were effective primarily because of their *missionary spirit*, extensive use of *lay people*, and *inexpensive, reproducible* church strategies” (italics supplied).²¹ This is a profound observation. Early Adventism shared these early Methodist values and organized the church structure accordingly, but somewhere along the line Adventism, along with Methodism, lost these values and thus its mission edge.

As the church entered the twentieth century, there evidently arose a desire to change the missional structure of the early Adventist church in North America and to copy²² the Protestant churches by placing settled pastors over the churches. Ellen White rebelled against this because it would mean a loss of mission and would result in the

²⁰ Finke and Start, *Church Planting Movements in North America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 150, quoted in Sanchez, 484-485.

²¹ Sanchez, 485. The interplay of these elements contributes to one’s effectiveness.

²² This “copying” concept is not new. It harks back to Israel of old who did not want to be different than their surrounding nations. Israel wanted a “king over us” as is explained by the story found in 1 Sam 12. Although it was completely contrary to God’s plan for Israel, He allowed it. The same is true for the Adventist church. As the cry goes up “we want a pastor over us,” God allowed it. As with Israel, there were warnings of what would happen, so with Adventism, there were warnings against this direction which have also been ignored.

“So we hired our pastors. We, the laity, then sat back and watched the pastors work themselves to death, while we criticized them for not doing it right. Eventually, we were not even satisfied to have a pastor over three or four churches; we each wanted a pastor over our own church. ‘After all,’ we cried, ‘we pay our tithe to the conference. Why shouldn’t the conference send us a pastor? We’re losing our members because we don’t have a pastor!’ Tragically, the above scene has been repeated all over North America. The result has been financially strapped conferences, who don’t have enough money to send pastors into new areas to raise up churches.” Burrell, *Revolution in the Church* (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Research Center, 1993), 38.

spiritual decline of the church. Noting these penetrating statements: ‘There has been too much spiritual energy expended in the church at Battle Creek. Those who have listened to the precious truth that has been pouring forth in such a free manner as it has there, have generally failed to receive or to appreciate the light given. They have failed to communicate what they have received. The persons who have been attending the ministerial institutes, have had presented before them line upon line and precept upon precept; here a little, and there a little. But they have failed to receive any great benefit, because they have not imparted the light to others. The great outlay caused by these institutes, which have been held so often, would have brought far better returns if expended in maintaining the ministers in some part of God’s neglected vineyard where there are no Sabbath-keepers. If the large churches settled in some of our cities were scattered to the four quarters of the globe, they might reveal how much the truth they have appropriated has to do with the shaping of individual character, and many eyes would be opened to behold the light of the truth. As they saw the great ignorance existing among the people, they would realize that there is work, solid, earnest work, for all in the neglected portions of the Lord’s vineyard. If they were sons and daughters of God indeed, they would see that there is need of decided effort to reach the *heathen in America* as well as in heathen lands. The gospel is to go to every nation, tongue, and people, and ministers are not to devote their labors so entirely to the churches which know the truth. *Both ministers and people lose much by following this method of labor.* It is by engaging in earnest work, by hard, painful experience, that we are enabled to reach the men and women of our cities, to call them in from the highways and the byways of life. But many of our people are surfeited with the privileges they have enjoyed, and have lost the sense of the value of human souls.’ Ellen White, “Go Ye Into All the World,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, June 11, 1895. (Italics supplied.)

‘There should not be a call to have settled pastors over our churches, but let the life-giving power of the truth impress the individual members to act, leading them to labor interestedly to carry on efficient missionary work in each locality. As the hand of God, the church is to be educated and trained to do effective service. Its members are to be the Lord’s devoted Christian workers.’ Ellen White, “The Work in Greater New York,” *Atlantic Union Gleaner*, January 8, 1902. (Italics supplied.)

Ellen White’s counsel is unmistakable. It is not the Lord’s plan for the Seventh-day Adventist Church to have settled pastors. She was very concerned, lest church members begin to *depend on the pastors and lose their spirituality* (italics supplied).²³

Just in case one is tempted to minimize the impact of Adventism’s current

²³Russell Burrill, *A Study of the Biblical Terms for Clergy and Their Historical Development in Christianity and Adventism* (Berrien Springs, MI: North American Division Evangelism Institute, 1994), 92-93.

condition, referring to the hiring of Adventist pastors (and more recently the trend for local churches to personally hire Bible workers to assist “their” pastor) to do the work of ministry, while the laity pay, attend, and observe, Burrill states, “This practice has resulted in the present Laodicean condition.”²⁴

Thanks to the work of Lonnie Wibberding, a pastor in the Pennsylvania Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, appendix A through D contains statistical information compiled from public information found on the www.AdventistStatistics.org web page showing Adventist church growth trends.²⁵

As Adventism followed Methodism with its loss of the circuit riding preacher, a

²⁴Burrill, *Revolution in the Church* 12, 41.

²⁵To summarize Wibberding: during 1863 and 1900 the church grew on average 8.9 percent per year. If Adventism had kept an 8.9 percent growth rate it had before 1900 it would have 768 million members instead of the 16 million members we have today. Since 1900, separate North American statistics have been kept, although some of the early years are a bit sketchy, 4.9 percent is the best rate of growth in North America with 2006 seeing 1.74 percent growth.

In contrast, “The early Christian church faced a similar challenge. In AD 40 the Roman Empire had a population of 60 million people with a very small Christian population. By 350 AD [310 years later] there were as many as 31 million Christians—more than half of the population. Many historians believe that mass conversions caused such astounding growth, such as when 3,000 people converted on the day of Pentecost. In his book *The Cities of God*, Rodney Stark quotes from the famed historian Adolph von Harnack, who argued, ‘Christianity must have reproduced itself by means of miracles.’ That idea troubled Stark, who spent much of his career studying how conversion takes place and how religious groups grow. As Stark began to examine the growth of early Christianity in detail, he discovered something quite remarkable. In a 1995 *Sociology of Religion* article, he wrote, ‘Fortunately, the ‘facts’ justifying the miraculous assumption [of Harnack] were wrong. The only reason people believed in an arithmetic need for mass conversion was because no one ever bothered to do the actual arithmetic.’ When Stark did the math, he discovered that the church growing by as little as 3.42 percent a year would account for the remarkable growth of Christianity in the first three centuries.” David T. Olson, *The American Church in Crisis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 38, 44.

centralized church hierarchy, and diminished role for the laity, full-time clergy becoming normative, increasing educational requirements, and rising affluence, Burrill points out how the church began to credit its declining growth to the *lack* of pastors and suggested that more pastors would solve this problem. Although it is no secret which argument won, “Ellen White, however remained loyal to the New Testament paradigm and warned the church that the addition of settled pastors would not solve the spiritual problem and might even make it worse.”²⁶ The last 100 years have sadly confirmed Ellen White’s warning. Current Adventist research will be shared later in this chapter.

Spiritual Development, Aggressive Service

Professional pastors, including modern day Bible workers,²⁷ settled over each church which opened the door for aggressive service to be transferred to those who were now “paid”²⁸ by the church members. The responsibility that used to be on the shoulders of lay people now rested on the shoulders of the paid and settled pastoral staff. Spiritual lethargy resulted and what Adventism currently considers “normal,” Ellen White would

²⁶Burrill, *A Study of the Biblical Terms for Clergy*, 94.

²⁷While this author was working for the Lay Institute for Evangelism, LIFE, an ASI Bible worker certification school, I began to realize how Bible workers are now being hired by local churches as a relatively “low-cost” pastor. Many of the expectations placed upon pastors are being transferred onto Bible workers, namely, we pay you to do the work of ministry, “feed us,” and fill up our church.

²⁸This author upholds Scripture’s affirmation that a worker is worthy of their hire. Being paid is not the primary problem. It is the combination of paying settled pastors which has helped create non-biblical expectations among the church members. Lay people were able to view the settled pastors as a provider of service that they had paid for and therefore deserved and to which they were entitled.

consider “unfaithful,”²⁹ a development that still exists in Adventism.

Forgetting that strength to resist evil is best gained by aggressive service, they [Jerusalem believers] began to think that they had not work so important as that of shielding the church in Jerusalem from the attacks of the enemy. Instead of educating the new converts to carry the gospel to those who had not heard it, they were in danger of taking a course that would lead all to be satisfied with what had been accomplished. To scatter His representatives abroad, where they could work for others, God permitted persecution to come upon them. Driven from Jerusalem, the believers “went everywhere preaching the word.” Those who would be overcomers must be drawn out of themselves; and the only thing which will accomplish this great work, is to become intensely interested in the salvation of others.³⁰

As long as there is someone, be it pastoral staff, stipend pastors, or Bible workers, to carry the responsibility of aggressively working for the salvation of lost people, there could well be a “conflict of interest” built into the Adventist system which continues to maintain the current condition in which Adventism finds itself. Could it be that, like Jerusalem, correction of the system may take “persecution”? But persecution may take a different form.

²⁹“Ellen White felt so keenly about clergy being trainers and equippers rather than performers of ministry, she even stated that pastors who are performing ministry rather than teaching members to minister should be fired.” Ellen White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1948), 197-198, quoted in Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach*, 162.

Burrill also brings to attention the lack of strict geographical lines that existed in early Adventism. “The early Adventists were so concerned with spreading the message that conferences did not limit their employees to work only in the conference that supported them. As late as 1903, local conferences employed ministers in other states. At the 1903 session, the California Conference reported fifty-five laborers on the payroll with thirty-two ordained ministers, six of whom labored in foreign lands. Also included were nine licentiates, three of whom worked in Great Britain but were paid by California. Eleven people were given a missionary license, one of whom worked in England and one in the Georgia Conference, yet were paid by California.” California Minutes of April 13, 1903, 10, quoted in Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach*, 156.

³⁰Ellen White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1923), 207.

“Interestingly, while North America Adventists abandoned the New Testament model of clergy ministry in this century, the third world, probably because of financial reasons, continued in the biblical mode.”³¹ Although it has taken years for Adventism to transition to its current condition,³² a condition characterized by the lack of finances may necessitate and expedite Adventism’s return to the biblical model.³³ Burrill would argue finances or no finances, Adventism has a strong motivation to return to its roots. “The Adventist church professes to be rooted in Scripture and loyal to the concepts given to them through the inspired guidance of Ellen White. Since the witness of Scripture and Ellen White both insist on the church not having settled pastors, perhaps it is time for the modern Adventist church to heed the counsel it has received.” This is challenging to any conscientious Adventist. Given the American and Adventist church crisis to which we now turn, there might be a heightened desire to making this challenge a reality.

³¹Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach*, 178.

³²This condition of settling pastors was lamented by H. M. S. Richards as late as 1957. H. M. S. Richards, *Feed My Sheep* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1958), 156, quoted in Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach*, 171-172.

³³For a more comprehensive and in depth reading, chapter seven, “The Role of the Clergy in Early Adventism,” of Russell Burrill’s dissertation, *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life and Mission of the Local Church* (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Books, 1998) is recommended.

Statement of the Problem

As I sit down to write, Yahoo's headline news reads, "More Americans say they have no religion."³⁴ Although the article gives a rather simplistic summary, there are many factors contributing to this trend.

Specific to North America

Church attendance is steadily declining throughout North America.³⁵

Nevertheless, people are still seeking God but it is occurring outside the church walls.

"The percentage of Americans who express and experience their faith through the local church will drop from 70% in 2000 to about 30–35% in 2025. And the percentage of people experiencing their faith through an alternative faith-based community will increase from 5% in 2000 to 30–35% in 2025."³⁶

In response to these trends, Roger Gehring argues that "in light of the well-known missiological problem that mainline churches are, as a rule, no longer reaching the

³⁴Yahoo News, headline, http://www.yahoo.com/s/ap/20090309/ap_on_re/rel_religious_america/pring (accessed March 9, 2009).

³⁵In 1990, 20.4% of the population attended a Christian church on any given weekend. In 2000, that percentage dropped to 18.7% and 17.5% by 2005. While church attendance numbers have stayed about the same from 1990 to 2004, the U.S. population has grown by 18.1%—more than 48 million people.

Rebecca Barnes and Lindy Lowry, "Special Report: The American Church in Crisis, 2006" *Outreach*, May/June 2006, 3. Page numbering is based on the online printed copy which is no longer available through Outreach's web page. But a pdf copy of this article can be downloaded from www.adamsonline.org/SimpleChurch/AmericanChurchCrisis.pdf

³⁶George Barna, *Revolution* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2005), 49.

unchurched, it is precisely here that house churches have great potential.”³⁷

There is a variety of additional related church issues about which researches are writing. They are included in appendix E for the reader who wants to explore a wider scope of the issues facing the North American Church.

Specific to Adventism in North America

It is reasonable to wonder if Adventism is the exception to the trends or if it is, for the most part, following the same trends as have been seen across North America.

The October 9, 2008 issue of the *Adventist Review* asked, “Where is the Mission?” The Adventist-to-population ratio revealed the following:

South Africa-Indian Ocean Division:	1:71
South Pacific Division	1:86
Inter-American Division	1:90
North American Division	1:319

North America can and should be considered a new mission field.

Monte Sahlin, in his book, *Adventist Congregations Today*, identifies a risk as “Adventist faith enters the 21 century; the risk that self-centered religion will become dominant as the Church struggles to keep missional goals clear and strong.”³⁸ This risk comes in response to Sahlin’s observation of how personal spirituality receives more

³⁷Gehring, 303.

³⁸Monte Sahlin, *Adventist Congregations Today: New Evidence for Equipping Healthy Churches* (Lincoln, NE: Center for Creative Ministry, 2003), 75.

support than items relating to the mission of the church.³⁹ This risk is confirmed later in his book.

Only about a third of the people in the pews say that their local church has a strong vision for mission to which they are personally committed, while another third say their local church has no vision for mission and almost a third say that although their local church has a vision for mission, they personally do not support it. Is Adventism becoming something other than a mission-driven movement?⁴⁰

At best, a third of the Adventist people identify a strong vision for mission. And this was in 2003. What about now? In the past five years is Adventism recapturing its mission, or is there evidence that suggests the contrary?

S. Joseph Kidder, associate professor of Christian Ministry at Andrews University Theological Seminary, conducted a research project that was partly published in 2008. The survey sought responses to three questions, one of which was, “In what witness activities do members generally participate, and how many were brought into the church as a result?”⁴¹

Kidder opens this article with the passage, “I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ” (Phil 6). “Paul’s desire for an active church in faith sharing continues as a perennial concern. Each generation needs to review its commitment level in witnessing and sharing their faith to the community, thus maintaining a continuous link with the

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid., 95.

⁴¹Joseph S. Kidder, “The Power of Relationships in Evangelism,” *Ministry*, July 2008, 10. There is more to Kidder’s research that has not been released yet. At the time of this writing, Kidder has been asked to *not* release the remaining research. There is no date set when the rest of this research study will be made available.

Great Commission entrusted to the church”⁴² What does Kidder discover? To the question, “‘How many people have you been wholly or partially responsible for bringing into the church in the last three years?’ About two-thirds indicated they were not aware of any.”⁴³ This leaves a third of the people who, like Sahlin’s research suggested, have some vision as is evidenced in personal outreach that has brought people “into the church.”

Much more could be explored regarding the relationship between Adventism and Christianity in general, but it seems that Adventism, when evaluating individual activity, is minimally involved in “Go”ing. In contrast, Adventism, as an organization, is doing much by those who tend to be “paid.” They are doing the “work” of the ministry when they should be “equipping” the saints for the work of ministry (Eph 4).

Specific to Florida

Church attendance trends specific to Florida are provided by Olson.⁴⁴

1990	16.6%
2000	15.2%
2005	14.3%

According to Olson, in each case these church attendance percentages are lower than the national average.

⁴²Ibid., 10.

⁴³Ibid., 10-11.

⁴⁴David T. Olson, “The American Church Research Project: The State of the Church in Florida 1990-2005,” PowerPoint, 16, <http://www.TheAmericanChurch.org> (accessed April 15, 2009).

Justification

Eight items form the bases of justification for this project:

There is a growing search for significant and meaningful relational connectedness with God and fellow human beings.⁴⁵

Between 2000 and 2005, 20 million Americans left their local churches in search of a deeper walk with God.⁴⁶ In a radio interview with George Barna and Frank Viola as guests, Barna reports that an estimated 70 million now meet outside the church walls in their quest to find God.⁴⁷

Many of the New Testament books are written to people meeting in house churches.⁴⁸ The book of Philemon is addressed to a house church.

⁴⁵“The key to understanding Revolutionaries is not what church they attend, or even if they attend. Instead, it’s their complete dedication to being thoroughly Christian by viewing every moment of life through a spiritual lens and making every decision in light of biblical principles. These are individuals who are determined to glorify God every day through every thought, word, and deed in their lives.” Barna, *Revolution*, 8.

⁴⁶“One of the most startling trends revealed by Barna relates to a group he calls “Revolutionaries.” These are individuals who are deeply committed to Christ, and who want more of God in their lives. Frustrated by churches in their attempts to satisfy that longing, *these individuals have crafted entirely new spiritual environments that draw them closer to God and other believers*, without the help of a conventional church. “There are well over 20 million adults who are pursuing a Revolutionary faith that is reminiscent of the early Church. They are meeting in homes, at work, in public places – *wherever they can connect and share their mutual love for Christ and pursue their desire to be obedient servants of God*. The energy and passion exhibited by these people is quite refreshing.” (Italics supplied.) Barna, *Revolution*, 13.

⁴⁷George Barna and Frank Viola, radio interview, <http://www.adamsonline.org/SimpleChurch/ViolaBarnaInterview.mp3> (accessed January 5, 2009).

⁴⁸The following passages are taken from the New Living Translation: Rom 16:5–Please give my greetings to the church that meets in their home. Greet my dear friend Epenetus. He was the very first person to become a Christian in the province of Asia; Rom 16:23–Gaius says hello to you. I am his guest, and the church meets here in his

The values and practices of our secular culture are increasingly reflecting the values and practices of the culture in which the New Testament church operated. House churches were instrumental in providing a place where the story of Jesus could be heard.

New Testament authors promote relational values. There are numerous “one another” verses in the New Testament which teach how to have healthy relationships and fellowship. Many of these passages are set in the context of a house church.

Ellen White is a great advocate for relational evangelism. “Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Savior mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, “Follow Me.”⁴⁹

Leonard Sweet says, “The greatest English speaking mission field in the world is North America.”⁵⁰

Adventists emphasize evangelistic outreach. In this authors opinion, House church

home. Erastus, the city treasurer, sends you his greetings, and so does Quartus, a Christian brother; 1 Cor 16:19–The churches here in the province of Asia greet you heartily in the Lord, along with Aquila and Priscilla and all the others who gather in their home for church meetings; Col 4:15–Please give my greetings to our Christian brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and those who meet in her house; Phil 1:1-3–This letter is from Paul, . . . I am also writing to the church that meets in your house. May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace. Acts 16:13–On the Sabbath we went a little way outside the city to a riverbank, where we supposed that some people met for prayer, and we sat down to speak with some women who had come together.

⁴⁹White, *Gospel Workers*, 363.

⁵⁰National Conference on Innovation, Ohio Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, <http://www.veotag.com/player/?u=aaequpqfkx&tid=2ee15c29-5c71-43dc-bf49-f8109d263539> (accessed June 21, 2009).

captures and more intentionally puts into practice our teaching that every member is a minister.

Methodology

The formal project started in January of 2008 by establishing a biblical foundation for a theology of missions. The theme of community, as it related to mission was traced through the following: God's invention of mission, Jesus' earthly mission, the invention and mission of His church, the Holy Spirit's role in missional community, and Adventists role in mission. Biblical passages that specifically identified house churches were exegeted. This was followed by a survey of New Testament worship elements found in the New Testament, all of which are discussed in chapter two.

Chapter three: Contemporary Literature research on house churches and house church networks located in North America. The characteristics of individual house churches, as well as house church networks, were identified, compared, and contrasted.

Chapter four: The Project Description began with a description of the pre-launch and work involved in launching the first house church. This was followed with a detailed description of the steps taken to actually get a house church started. A typical Sabbath gathering flow was outlined, followed by a discussion of obstacles faced and how they were solved.

House church health was assessed using the Natural Church Development Survey approximately fifteen months from the project launch.

The information gleaned from the project process was evaluated, with an eye to improving house church health and to incorporate the missionary multiplication process

which is documented in chapters five and six.

The formal project was completed March 31, 2009.

Definition of Terms

Church/Ecclesiology: The people (believers) who have accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Traditional/Typical Church: The Constantinian church model.

Constantinian Church Model: Where professional clergy, staff, Bible works and/or priests + public buildings rented or owned + multiple programs or ministries = “real” church.

House: A non-public location that serves as the basic earthly human structure of life in space and time.⁵¹

House Church: A non-public private home⁵² where believers and non-believers gather. House churches are also called mini church, micro church, organic church, home church, and simple church. Functionally, a house church is a “small group of people seeking intimate relationship with God and each other through hearing from God and living the Kingdom lifestyle.”⁵³ As in biblical times, house churches are the church, but they do not “go to” church in the style of a traditional church.

Adventist House Church: A house church that meets on the Sabbath in a home and where the CORE4 leadership believe and practice the Bible teaching as taught by the

⁵¹Barth and Blanke, 263.

⁵²Gehring, 27.

⁵³Sanchez, 26.

Seventh-day Adventist Church. This meeting is seen as a real church gathering.

CORE4: A group of four Seventh-day Adventists who start a Simple Church.

Holistic Cell Groups: Mid-week meetings that occur in addition to weekend worship services. Participants see the weekend celebration and/or church service as a gathering of all the people in groups gathering for a high day of worship.

Small Groups: A group of people who can be holistic or task oriented.

Simple Church: Specifically refers to the name of this project's Adventist house church.

Simple Church Network: This author chose the name Simple Church which is not connected to other non-Adventist simple church networks. In this dissertation the Simple Church Network specifically refers to a collection of Adventists house churches which multiplied into new locations from the first Simple Church, thus the network.

Church Plant: Either a house church or a traditional church.

Church Planting Movements (CPM): A rapid and multiplicative increase of indigenous churches planting churches within a given people group or population segment.⁵⁴

UnChurched: People who attend a church building or house church less than once a month.

Mission: The work of God in reconciling sinful humankind to Himself.⁵⁵

⁵⁴David Garrison, "Church Planting Movements," Office of Overseas Operations International Mission Board, 7, <http://www.ibm.org> (accessed November 2008).

⁵⁵Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Missions: Biblical Foundations & Contemporary Strategies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 20.

Missions: The plans of committed believers to accomplish the mission of God.⁵⁶

Missional: Distinguishes house churches that engage in the culture with the gospel, make disciples, and plant churches from those house churches that do not.⁵⁷

Adventist Frontier Missionary: Usually refers to a specific Adventist organization that sends Adventists into areas where there is no Adventist presence. In the context of this dissertation, frontier missionary refers to the same type of front-line missionary work, but carried out in North America and other Western cultures. To help people catch the essence on which Simple Church is focusing, the author of this dissertation has found it helpful if people have an understanding of the Adventist Frontier Mission organization, to explain Simple Church as Adventist Front-line Missions to North America.

Culture: The integrated system of learned behavior patterns, ideas, and products characteristic of a society.⁵⁸

Clergy: Defined by Webster as “a group ordained to perform pastoral or sacerdotal functions in the Christian church.”⁵⁹

*Lait*y: Defined by Webster as “the people of a religious faith as distinguished from its clergy” but more pointedly as “the mass of the people as distinguished from those of a particular profession or those specially trained.”⁶⁰

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷J. D. Payne, *Missional House Churches: Reaching Our Communities with the Gospel* (Colorado Springs, CO: Paternoster Publishing, 2008), 8.

⁵⁸Erich W. Baumgartner, *Passport to Mission* (Berrien Springs, MI: Institute of World Mission, 1999), 60.

⁵⁹Sanchez, 472.

⁶⁰Ibid.

Neighbor and Neighborhood: Defined more by the telephone, car, and work situation than by locality.⁶¹

Limitations

There are a number of limitations which fall into two general categories.

Personal Limitations

This project was delimited in a number of areas. I limited this project to, as the title suggests, (1) developing an Adventist house church, (2) planting one house church in my home, and (3) multiplying this initial house church into additional locations, thus an Adventist network. I was also committed to beginning this process with the Florida Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. A time constraint of fifteen months, which began January of 2007, was another self-imposed limitation. This project used one evaluation tool, Natural Church Development, to assess health and vitality. Biblical quotations are taken from the New Living Translations unless noted.

Limitations

All research has to assume a level of trust in the sources used. This also means one does his/her best to assess the credibility and integrity of each source consulted. In this author's case, this would apply to the Bible, those who publish statistical research trends, commentaries, and books written regarding the related field of research.

Natural Church Development (NCD) is the evaluation tool used to assess the

⁶¹Robert Banks and Julia Banks, *The Church Comes Home* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 121.

development of this project. NCD will have its own limitations as well as the limitations that this author brings to the project due to life experience, age, and/or preconceived ideas which one tries to set aside.

Summary

With this background, as outlined in this chapter, we are now ready to turn our attention to setting out a Biblical Foundation, the focus of chapter two.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Over the past three decades there has been an increased interest in house churches, which has been accompanied by a proliferation of both scholarly and popular publications. Roger W. Gehring, in his landmark volume says, “On one point nearly all NT Scholars presently agree: early Christians met almost exclusively in homes of individual members of the congregation.”¹ What does this mean for congregations today? Should Christian churches replicate the New Testament model in our day? How much? How little? What should be the goal? Is following the New Testament house-church model the goal? Is advancing God’s Kingdom work here on earth the goal? Or, is there yet another goal?

A Theology of Missions

Alan Hirsch, in his book, *The Forgotten Ways*, includes a helpful diagram.

Christology determines **Missiology** which determines **Ecclesiology**²

By my reading of the scriptures, ecclesiology is the most fluid of the doctrines. The church is a dynamic cultural expression of the people of God in any given place. Worship style, social dynamics, liturgical expressions must result from the process of

¹Gehring, 1.

²Hirsch, 143. A theology of church and community unfolds as missional community is explored throughout this chapter.

contextualizing the gospel in any given culture. *Church must follow mission.*³

Gram Cray agrees with Hirsch in that starting with the existing church skips the foundational work. “Those who start with the questions about the relationship to the existing Church have already made the most common and most dangerous mistake. Start with the Church and the mission will probably get lost. Start with mission and it is likely that the Church will be found.”⁴

Hirsch would correctly argue that Christian mission begins with Jesus, who He is, and what He came to do. Jesus is our constant reference point. And it is Jesus who determines the Church’s mission, which is where we get our sense of mission to “go into all the world.” Although Hirsch would not disagree, based on a shared theology of the Trinity, that God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are the reference point. All participate in mission, and each One plays their unique part.

God: The Inventor of Mission

When Christians think “mission,” they usually begin with the Gospel Commission, “go and make disciples (Matt 28:18-20).” with an ultimate goal of saving lost people.

³Hirsch, 143.

⁴Gram Cray, *The Mission Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of the Church in a Changing Context* (Brookvale, NSW, Australia: Willow Publishing, 2005), 116, quoted in Hirsch, 143.

“The early Christians were not focused on the church but rather on following Jesus and doing His mission, and the church emerged from that.” Martin Robinson and Dwight Smith, *Invading Secular Space: Strategies for Tomorrow’s Church* (London: Monarch, 2003), 40.

When God, the inventor of mission, thinks about mission, He begins with creation (Gen 1:1-2:25). His ultimate goal was/is to create a new community which flows out of His existing community. Gailyn Van Rheenen, in his book entitled *Missions*, says, “Mission does not originate with human sources, for ultimately it is not a human enterprise.”⁵

Genesis 1:26 records, “Then God said, ‘Let *us* make people in our image, to be like *ourselves* (italics supplied).’”⁶ God’s mission for community comes out of His own existing community. He longed for a relationship with us before we even existed. So, God goes on a mission of creation.

The story is continued in verse 28, “God blessed them and told them, ‘Multiply and fill the earth.’ Unique to God’s mission, is how He creates a community that has the ability to procreate community. Not only is there an ability to procreate community, there is an express command to “multiply and fill the earth.”

However, within two chapters, God’s mission needs a revision. Adam and Eve acquiesce to Satan’s temptations in the Garden. Sin is introduced, and true to His mission for community, God takes the first step. “Toward evening they [Adam and Eve] heard the LORD God walking about in the garden, so they hid themselves among the trees. The LORD God called to Adam, ‘Where are you?’” (Gen 3:8-9). It might appear that all is lost, but there is hope! God’s mission always brings hope.

“From now on, you and the woman will be enemies, and your offspring and her

⁵Van Rheenen, 14.

⁶All Bible verses are taken from the New Living Translation, 1996, unless otherwise noted.

offspring will be enemies. He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Gen 3:15).

These observations clearly show that in this pronouncement is compressed the record of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, a battle that began in heaven (Rev. 12:7-9), was continued on earth, where Christ again defeated him (Heb. 2:14), and will terminate finally with Satan’s destruction at the end of the millennium (Rev. 20:10).⁷

Here, in this promise, the next phase of God’s mission is unveiled.

Jesus: The Illustration of Community

“Mission is rooted in the nature of God, who sends and saves.”⁸ God sends Jesus Christ on a mission of salvation, but this mission is different than our mission. Jesus is the mission, and He is sent on a mission. He is God incarnate.

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). As a baby Christ entered the very community He created. He felt our pain and suffering. The very essence of His presence and power brought healing, hope, and salvation to all who would receive Him. Yes, Christ was/is on a mission but, He is also *the* mission. He is the Spring that brings forth living water. He is both the Source and Inventor of mission.

While Christ lived among us, He introduced the next phase of His mission.

⁷“It shall bruise thy head,” *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1953-1957), 1:233.

⁸Van Rhee, 14.

Church: The Expression of Community

“The *most* critical issue facing the expansion of the North American Church today is a theological issue.”⁹ J. D. Payne is not the only one who expresses this concern. Daniel R. Sanchez says, “One of the most crucial issues pertaining to church planting movements in North America has to do with the definition of church that is employed.”¹⁰ Both Payne and Sanchez invite all to rethink what “church” means.

The New Testament uses the Greek word, *ekklesia* to describe church. *Ekklesia* is a compound word consisting of *ek*, meaning “out of,” and *klesis*, “a calling.” *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* agrees, “In Scripture the word *church* is a translation of the Greek *ekklesia*, which means ‘a calling out.’”¹¹ *Ekklesia* is used one hundred and fourteen times. Sometimes it is translated as “assembly” (three times), “church” (seventy-four times), “churches” (thirty-five times), and “congregation” (two times).¹²

The Bible compares “the Church” to a human body (1 Cor 12:13). This metaphor

⁹Payne, 18.

¹⁰Sanchez, 35. Sanchez raises a number of questions: “This basic question spawns other related queries: Is a church defined in terms of its membership? If so, how many members does it take to make a church? Does a congregation need to have its own building in order to be considered a church? How much financial strength does a group need in order to be considered a church? Does a congregation need to have a full-time formally trained pastor and staff in order to be a church? Is there a minimal number of organizations that a group needs to have to qualify for church status? Is there a standard number of elected officers that is needed? Is a church determined by the number of functions it carries out? If so what are they? Are there other criteria that need to be employed to ascertain if a group is truly a church?” Ibid.

¹¹*Seventh-day Adventists Believe: A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines*, ed. P. G. Damsteegt (Washington, DC: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988), 136.

¹²Payne, 21. Payne uses the *Holman Christian Standard Bible*.

emphasizes unity and the functional relationship each person plays to the whole.¹³ It suggests something that is alive, vibrant, and healthy.

The *ekklesia*, or the “called out ones” of the New Testament is described by Peter:

Come to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God’s temple. He was rejected by the people, but he is precious to God who chose him. And now God is building you, as living stones, into his spiritual temple. What’s more, you are God’s holy priests, who offer the spiritual sacrifices that please him because of Jesus Christ. As the Scriptures express it, “I am placing a stone in Jerusalem, a chosen cornerstone, and anyone who believes in him will never be disappointed.” Yes, he is very precious to you who believe. But for those who reject him, “The stone that was rejected by the builders has now become the cornerstone.” And the Scriptures also say, “He is the stone that makes people stumble, the rock that will make them fall.” They stumble because they do not listen to God’s word or obey it, and so they meet the fate that has been planned for them. But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. *You are a kingdom of priests, God’s holy nation, his very own possession. This is so you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.* “Once you were not a people; now you are the people of God. Once you received none of God’s mercy; now you have received his mercy.” Dear brothers and sisters, you are foreigners and aliens here. So I warn you to keep away from evil desires because they fight against your very souls. *Be careful how you live among your unbelieving neighbors. Even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will believe and give honor to God when he comes¹⁴ to judge the world* (1 Pet 2:5-12, italics supplied).

Jesus uses this same kind of language when he says, “In the same way, let your

¹³*Seventh-day Adventist Believe*, 136.

¹⁴Some might argue that this is a reference to Christ’s second coming, but a strong case can be made to show a current contextual application.

Gr. *Episkope*, “a looking over,” perhaps by the heathen as they scrutinize the “good works” of church members, or by God when He “looks over” the records of men in the judgment. Because one purpose of the Christian life is to reveal the character of God and thereby cause the heathen to consider their own relationship to Him, the first explanation may harmonize best with the context. By “looking over” the noble character of a genuine Christian the heathen will have sufficient cause to “glorify God.” The best way for the heathen to glorify God is to submit to His grace and to His power to transform character. “Episkope,” *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1953-1957), 7:564.

good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father”
(Matt 5:16).

The church is “called out” to both “be” and to “show.” They are to *be* the kingdom of priests, God’s holy nation, and all that encompasses this high calling; and they are to *show* to others the goodness of God by *being* the people God intended His church to be.

It is most interesting that “unbelieving neighbors” come to believe because of what they see in the everyday lives of the believers. Robert and Julia Banks get right to the point when they reference Tom Wolfe.

The basic thrust of New Testament evangelism was not individual evangelism, not mass evangelism, and was definitely not child evangelism. The normative pattern of evangelism in the early church was *oikos* evangelism . . . sharing the astoundingly good news about Jesus in one’s sphere of influence, the interlocking social system composed of family, friends and associates.¹⁵

Wolfgang Simson in his book, *Houses That Changes the World*, captures the essence of this way of life and thinking that was foundational among early Christians.

George Kretschmar points out, that “the recruitment to faith was never institutionalized, there was not organizing the congregation for missions.” The impact of the church as an entity was so strong that most early Christians did not even pray for the conversion of pagans, but, according to Yves Congar, a Dominican scholar, they prayed for the prosperity and peace of the people. There is, says Norbert Brox, an “astonishing absence of thinking and talking about missions.” The reason for this ‘absence’ is the same as for the ‘absence’ of evangelism: *the church in itself was the mission*. The ‘missionary journeys’ of Paul and his companions were not understood as ‘missions’ as we know it by Paul himself: the expression only emerged as the title to hand-drawn maps of the Mediterranean in the appendix of Bibles centuries later. Paul was simply doing apostolic and prophetic ministry, and so was the church that had been planted and emerged through these ministries. Since the church was the

¹⁵Tom Wolfe, “Oikos Evangelism: Key to the Future,” in *Future Church*, ed. R. Neighbour Jr. (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1980), 166, quoted in Banks and Banks, 233.

mission, it did not send out special ‘missionaries’ as such: it literally sent out itself, in the form of units, embryonic units of two and three form a local church, which carried within themselves the vision and virus of church, ready to infect whatever they touched (*italic supplied.*)¹⁶

Banks and Simson are not alone in this understanding. Robert Jewett echos this when he says in his critical and historical commentary on the Bible,

In contrast to modern usage, the word ‘church’ did not refer to a distinctive building until centuries after the writing of Romans. The definitive study of house congregations and house churches by Hans-Josef Klauck opens with a citation from Heinz Schurmann, “The living space of the congregation is the house.” These and other widely accepted studies investigate the references to houses as the meeting places of early Christian congregations and usually assume a freestanding building owned or rented by the patron or patroness of a house church. Although the term *oikos* can refer not only to a Roman atrium, a Greek peristyle home, a Hellenistic style of courtyard with adjoining rooms, or even an apartment in an insula building that has shops on the ground floor, the standard conclusion is that “Private houses were the first centers of church life.”¹⁷

It is only the indwelling, life-changing power of the Holy Spirit that can empower a community of believers to live their lives in such a way as to cause unbelieving neighbors to take note. It is to the Holy Spirit that we turn our attention.

Holy Spirit: The Empowerer of Community

It is well recognized that before Jesus returned to Heaven, He gave them the work of making disciples; He gave them something to do (Matt 28:18-20). But prior to this, Jesus had given other instructions. In one of these meetings as He was eating a meal with them, He told them, “Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you what he promised. Remember, I have told you about this before. John baptized with water, but in

¹⁶Simson, 44-45.

¹⁷Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 958.

just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:4-5.)

On the day of Pentecost, seven weeks after Jesus’ resurrection, the believers were meeting together in one place. Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm in the skies above them, and it filled the house where they were meeting. Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability (Acts 2:1-4).

This outpouring of God’s Spirit filled His church, His people, with the ability to *be* living testimonies to the life-changing power of God, and to continue to be the mission of Jesus, both in being and doing. Larry Kreider and Floyd McClung articulate this by saying, “The New Testament church, as encountered in the book of Acts, was defined as *people*. Believers did not *go* to church or *join* the church—they *were* the Church.”¹⁸ Simply said, wherever there is a community of God-honoring people, there is church. Robert and Julia Banks capture this somewhat “both–and” theology of mission in their book, *The Church Comes Home*. “In summary, we cannot simply define the church as existing primarily for others and for mission. It exists primarily for God and for community. It is not just a *means* to some missionary end. It is an *end* itself, not the end only for *itself*. In other words, it is not an end purely *for itself* so much as *for others*.¹⁹

The church, empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit in peoples’ lives, is both the continued expression of Jesus Christ as “the mission,” as well as the continuation of His salvific mission to earth.

¹⁸Larry Kreider and Floyd McClung, *Starting a House Church: A New Model for Living Out Your Faith* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2007), 9.

¹⁹Banks and Banks, 230.

Adventists: A Missional²⁰ Community

Seventh-day Adventists believe they are “called out” for a special mission.²¹ This mission grows out of God’s mission, a mission for community, and now a mission to restore the Eden-like community that existed before sin entered this world. The Adventist Church not only has a mission and message to share with the world, Adventists must first show this mission and message. And to show it, Adventists must become the message by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. This is what, like in the early church, will cause “unbelieving neighbors” to take note.

This is not so much a new paradigm, as it is an old paradigm re-emerging from its lost place in the early church and in the 19th century history of the Adventist Church, says Sahlin.²² Ellen White’s paradigm for missions was two-fold: “First meet the temporal

²⁰“Missional” has become a very popular word that has developed a meaning of its own. The author uses this word in the context of a community that has been called and given a unique mission.

²¹“If the goal of the Adventist’s mission is to produce the people described in Revelation 14:1-5, then their evangelistic strategy must follow the pattern of Revelation 14:6-12. Adventists must preach this unique message in the context of the *eschaton*. The evangelistic mandate, originating out of the Great Commission and elaborated by the distinctive message of Revelation 14, must be the guideline for the accomplishment of Adventists mission. Hence, Adventists can never be content with merely bringing people to initial faith in Christ and not into full discipleship. The Adventists mission can be understood only against the backdrop of Revelation 14 and the disciple-making mandate of the Great Commission.” Russell Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach*, 53.

For an extended discussion of the Seventh-day Adventist unique mission, see *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 161-169.

For additional information on the Adventist mission read: Ellen White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), 9.

²²Sahlin, 20.

needs of the people, and relieve their physical wants and sufferings, and you will find an open avenue to the heart, where you may plant the good seed of virtue and religion.”²³

She did not favor an approach which focuses exclusively on proclamation. In fact, she wrote that “preaching is a small part of the work to be done for the salvation of souls.” (*Review & Herald*, August 22, 1899.) Appealing to the example of Christ’s incarnational approach to ministry, which brings Christian witness into the secular areas of life, Ellen White states that “the followers of Christ are to labor as he did. We are to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and comfort the suffering and afflicted. We are to minister to the despairing and inspire hope in the hopeless.” In another place in *Desire of Ages*, a biography of Jesus Christ, she makes the point that the *Christian mission is to focus on the life and needs of the unreached*. “When we love the world as He loved it, then for us His mission is accomplished.” (Pages 350 and 641.) Ministries of compassion are just as central to her conception of Christian mission as are ministries of evangelism. The role of social concern and public service in the mission of the church is no more clearly stated than in Ellen White’s most paradigmatic passage on mission strategy, first published in *Ministry of Healing*, 143, and reprinted in many other places. “Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Savior mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then he bade them, ‘Follow me’” (italics supplied).²⁴

Talk about success, this alone should cause one to stop and take note. Given the cultural value system in North America that is often reflected among God’s people (the church), Adventists seem to be obsessed with fast, measurable success. White’s opening sentence re-frames “true success.” Notice the order of progression given to all who would carry out God mission of recreation and redemption:

First, Christ mingled. This does not fit the fast-food approach in North America. People intuitively know if you really care about them. Mingling is not an item one usually checks off the “to do” list. It is a way of life, and for this to become a way of life, one has

²³Ellen White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9 vols. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948), 5:227.

²⁴Sahlin, 20-21.

to simplify and re-prioritize. Mingling takes time. Mingling requires one to have time to “waste” with unbelieving neighbors. Mingling is a prerequisite. No mingling, no ministering; no ministering, no winning of confidence; no confidence, no context to bid one to follow Jesus Christ; and therefore, no “true success.”

Second, Christ showed sympathy. Peter’s counsel to “show others the goodness of God” has already been considered. Now White continues in this same direction. To show the goodness of God means to be His hands and feet, to continue God’s mission of recreation, of redemption, to show sympathy. It is impossible to show sympathy if one has not learned about the pain and sorrow that exist in the lives of others. And even though it might be possible to sympathize from a distance, the context of White’s reflection comes in the context of community.

Third, Christ ministered to their needs. It should go without saying that if one mingles with unbelieving neighbors, then one should be able to recognize felt needs and minister to them. This does not require classes, surveys, and highly organized strategies. It requires meaningful involvement in the lives of those that God has brought across our paths.²⁵ All sympathizing and ministering should be authentic. It needs to be done because of Christ, who is in us and in His church, in His people. It is this no-strings-attached and no-score-kept ministry that causes unbelieving neighbors to take note.

Fourth, Christ won their confidence. Winning confidence is not something one

²⁵Henry Blackaby in his book, *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God*, writes extensively on this way of life. Henry Blackaby, Richard Blackaby, and Claude King, *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008).

does. It is the natural result of authentic mingling, sympathizing, and ministering to the needs of people. In other words, winning confidence is not the next item on the “to do” list. It naturally happens when one allows God to transform our lives, to live in and through our lives, to show the goodness of God, and to be the people God wants us to be.

Fifth, Christ bids us, “Follow me.” Adventists are at risk for minimizing the first steps, and silently think that now we have arrived at the activity that really counts. For the past number of years our evangelistic models have tended to completely ignore mingling, sympathizing, ministering, and winning confidence. We have tended, rather, to shortcut the process and too soon bring in professional evangelists to bid people to follow Christ.²⁶ It is rather like trying to harvest a garden before you plant and tend it. Is this method considered “true success?” Of course, it will bring success. Sahlin recognized this problem, but uses language that describes it as an overseas missionary problem. Could it be a North American problem as well?

There is a false success that can result from a different approach in the place of the “true” success that will result from this divinely approved approach. The professional literature of missiology is familiar with this false success. If a missionary arrives in an unreached community and engages almost entirely in proclamation of the gospel message, directly confronting non-belief, there will be “success.” Some will accept

²⁶To some leading evangelists credit they have spent significant amounts of time and money sending in people to train lay people 6-9 months before an evangelistic series. This authors most recent participation in this process observed over 100 lay people who were training as lay Bible workers, but when it was time for the visitation, professional Bible workers were hired. It is unclear as to if the lay Bible workers did not follow through thus creating the need for hired Bible workers. As the series closed lay Bible workers were called upon to carry on with Bible study interests. Being part of this process, approximately twenty lay-trained Bible works responded to this call. This was a good start but it was not sufficient to carry the load. As of late, more professional Bible workers are being hired to follow up and rekindle a spiritual interest in people who at one time responded favorable. Adventists need to ask, is this what Ellen White had in mind?

the message and be baptized. But, over time the missionary will discover that these early adopters of the message are mostly individuals who are perceived as marginal to the community—needing a place to belong and be accepted—and that their acceptance of the message creates a barrier that makes it impossible for most of the community to hear the message. An infiltration approach [incarnational approach], such as that advocated by Ellen White, does not have the same immediate results, but in the long run opens up a far wider audience for the message.²⁷

Charles Kraft, in his book, *Christianity in Culture*, recounts a telling story of where true success was replaced by a false success.

In attempting to discover a dynamic equivalent form of preaching I once asked a group of Nigerian church leaders what would be the appropriate way to present a message such as the Christian one to the village council. They replied: “We would choose the oldest, most respected man in the group and ask him a question. He would discourse, perhaps at length, on the topic and then become silent, whereupon we would ask another question. As the old man talked, other old men would comment as well. But eventually he and the others would do less and less of the talking and we would do more and more. In this way we would develop our message and it would become the topic for discussion of the whole village.” I asked them why they didn’t employ this approach in church. “Why, we’ve been taught that monologue is the Christian way,” they replied. “Can this be why no old men come to church?” I asked. “Of course!” they said. “We have alienated them all by not showing them due respect in public meetings.”²⁸

An equally disturbing problem is doing extensive humanitarian and health ministry without ever inviting our unbelieving friends to follow Jesus. When Jesus sent John the Baptist’s disciples back to him in prison, Jesus said to tell John, “The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, and the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor” (Luke 7:22). Humanitarian work, medical work, mingling, sympathizing, ministering are all important; but these works are incomplete without including the gospel invitation.

²⁷Sahlin, 21.

²⁸Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 252.

Adventists need to rethink missional community here in North America. How do we both remain faithful to our unique message and to mission? We must begin as Christ did, by mingling, sympathizing, and ministering among our unbelieving neighbors in such a way as to gain their confidence, thus gaining a hearing, so we will be able to bid them follow Jesus Christ.

When God thought mission He created a procreating community out of the context of His community. When sin entered this community, mission was modified, and He sent Jesus, who is the mission, and is on a mission to redeem our fallen community. As Jesus finishes His mission, He invents the church and sends the Holy Spirit to empower His church to mingle, sympathize, and minister to unbelieving neighbors, showing them God's love, and inviting them to follow Jesus Christ.

“Greet the Church That Meets in His/Her Home”

The Gospel of Luke opens within the temple of Jerusalem (Luke 1:5-23) and closes in that same temple (Luke 24:53).

The Book of Acts of the Apostles opens in a home setting in Jerusalem (Acts 1:4, 13) and ends in a home setting in Rome (Acts 28:30).

Mario Barbero, in his Doctor of Philosophy dissertation observes, “In the Book of Acts the house, as a social institution, appears frequently and is significant in spreading the gospel ‘to the ends of the earth’ (Acts 1:8). In Acts there is a geographical movement

form Jerusalem to Rome. It seems there is also a religious movement from the Temple to the house.”²⁹

This change of direction is also observed in the frequency of synagogue and house activities recorded in Paul’s missionary journeys.

Paul’s first journey, Acts 13:4-15:41, begins in the town of Salamis where they went to the Jewish synagogues. There is no obvious or significant house activity. But it is worth noting that

when the Jewish leaders saw the crowds, they were jealous; so they slandered Paul and argued against whatever he said. Then Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and declared, ‘It was necessary that this Good News from God be given first to you Jews. But since you have rejected it and judged yourselves unworthy of eternal life—well, we will offer it to Gentiles.

Paul’s second journey, Acts chapters 16–18, records a mixture of synagogue and house activities. Acts 18:6-8 records,

But when the Jews opposed him and insulted him, Paul shook the dust from his robe and said, “Your blood be upon your own heads—I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.” After that he stayed with Titius Justus, a Gentile who worshiped God and lived next door to the synagogue. Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, and all his household believed in the Lord. Many other in Corinth also became believers and were baptized.

Paul’s third journey, beginning in Acts chapter 19, is quick to state in verse 8, “Then Paul went to the synagogue and preached boldly for the next three months, arguing persuasively about the Kingdom of God. But some rejected his message and publicly spoke against the Way, so Paul left the synagogue and took the believers with him. Then

²⁹Mario Barbero, “A First-century Couple, Priscilla and Aquila: Their House Churches and Missionary Activity” (D.Phil. dissertation, The Catholic University of America, 2001), 174.

he began preaching daily at the lecture hall of Tyrannus.” From this point on, it appears that there is no more significant synagogue activity.

Barbero adds a different perspective as he tracks Paul’s house church itinerary.

In the Acts of the Apostles, with frequent confirmation in Paul’s letters, the itinerary of Paul’s mission can be tracked in a sequence of house churches from Jerusalem to Rome. The sequence is as follows: Jerusalem and Judea (Acts 1:12-14; 2:1-4, 42-47; 4:23-31; 5:42; 8:3; 9:43; 12:12-19); Caesarea (Acts 10:1-11, 18); Damascus (Acts 9:10-19); Philippi (Acts 16:11-15, 25-34); Thessalonica (Acts 17:5-6); Corinth, three households: Stephanas (1 Cor 1:16; 16:15-18); Gaius (1 Cor 1:14; Rom 16:23); and Crispus (Acts 18:8; 1 Cor 1:14); Cenchrae (Rom 16:1-2); Troas (Acts 20:7-12); Ephesus (1 Cor 16:19; 2 Tim 4:19); Colossae: Philemon’s household (Phlm 2); Laodicea (Col 4:15); Rome, five households: Aquila and Prisca (Rom 16:3-5; Acts 18:2); Aristobulus (Rom 16:10); Narcissus (Rom 16:11); and the groups mentioned in Rom 16:14-15.³⁰

Barbero concludes, “So, the house is increasingly mentioned as the focus for . . . activities.”³¹ It included a place for the proclamation of the Gospel, a place for teaching, a place for worship, prayer, fasting, baptism, and the Lord’s Supper, a place for healing, and a place for distribution of goods to the needy. “The house is truly the axis of life of the early churches.”³²

³⁰John Elliott, “Philemon and House Churches,” TBT 22 (1984), 149, quoted in Barbero, 198.

³¹Barbero, 194.

³²Ibid., 222.

Referring to Lydia’s house church in Acts 16:40, Barbero suggests, “Lydia is the first Gentile woman to enter the church and to offer her house as a ‘house church’ for the community.” But of more interest is his suggestion, “By placing the story of Lydia after the council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) that admitted Gentile men into the Christian community, Acts reflects the community’s decision to include women as well.” Matson, *Household Conversion*, 152, quoted in Barbero, 209.

Gehring offers these comments, Acts 16 relates the story of how a house church was established in Lydia’s home (see pp. 131-32). Luke also portrays Lydia as the first

Jesus' Use of Homes

The Synoptic Gospels give evidence that Jesus taught not only in open-air settings, but in synagogues and houses as well. Roger Gehring references several scholars who maintain that He only taught in the synagogue or in the open. “Nevertheless, it is most likely, for a number of reasons, that Jesus practiced at least a sporadic, if not a regular, teaching ministry in homes.”³³

Gehring continues, “The assumption that Jesus used houses for his teaching ministry as well as for other activities is supported by three additional insights.”³⁴

First, in the ancient Jewish, Christian, and Hellenistic world, a private home often provided the meeting place for religious and intellectual dialogue and instruction. Second, as we consider the central economic and social significance of the *oikos* in the ancient world generally and in Palestine or Galilee specifically, it should not surprise us to discover that houses played a central role in the life and ministry of Jesus. Third, synagogues may well have been widespread in 70 C.E. and earlier, not only in the Diaspora but in Palestine as well, primarily in the form of house synagogues, that is, private homes that served with or without architectural alteration as the place of assembly for a synagogue community. We can assume, particularly for the poorer areas in Galilee, that these were house synagogues rather than the pompous structures we are familiar with from the third to sixth centuries C.E. Such house synagogues probably existed even in relatively small Jewish villages. Accordingly, the Gospels presuppose a multiplicity of them for Galilee as well. All of this is evidence that Jews of the first century were accustomed to meeting for worship in

Christian in Macedonia. Can we elevate her to leader of the church in her house on this basis alone? It is a very real possibility (cf. Acts 16:40). She appears to have led the house church particularly in the early days. On the other hand, she is not mentioned by name in the letter to the Philippians. Still, we need to recognize that with his report Luke also wants to say that, in spite of his Jewish training, Paul is willing to establish a church with a group of women. By implying that, in contrast to the synagogue (m. Meg. 4:3), women alone were allowed to found a Christian church, Luke indirectly points to a difference in the status of women in the two religious groups at that time. Gehring, 212.

³³Ibid., 29.

³⁴Ibid.

private homes, which in turn would apply also to Jesus and his disciples.³⁵

This gives a different view of Jesus' ministry. It also provides a wider scope on Bible verses that recorded Jesus' Sabbath "Synagogue" activity with regards to the type of location structure.³⁶

Oikos-Ekklesia Connection

Throughout the New Testament *oikos* is found 112 times and *oikia* is found 94 times. But there are only four New Testament texts that link *oikos* to *Ekklesia*: Rom 16:4; 1 Cor 16:19; Phil 2; and Col 4:15.³⁷ Attention will be turned to these four texts and the surrounding contexts.

Romans 16

Romans chapter 16 is often seen as a collection of greetings, similar to the way we might send greetings, by saying, "Be sure to tell your wife and family hello."

Upon a closer investigation, there are a number of interesting dynamics surrounding house churches.

Background items

Robert Jewett in his 1,144 page commentary notes a number of contextual background items which will be listed in bullet fashion.³⁸

³⁵Ibid., 29-30.

³⁶This is an area of research that deserves more attention.

³⁷Barbero, 174.

³⁸The following points come from Robert Jewett, 54-69, 113, 952, 959.

Most scholars currently feel that Gentile Christians formed the majority of the membership of the house churches at the time of the writing of Romans.

Using a topographic method based on the coincidence between five different types of archeological and literary evidence, two of the most likely areas for early Christian congregations were in Trastevere and the section on the Appian Way around the Porta Capena inhabited by the immigrants. Both these districts were swampy areas where the poorest populations of Rome lived.

Two-thirds of the names listed in Rom. 16 indicate Greek rather than Latin background, and confirm the immigrant status.

Two other districts in Rome show evidence of early Christian population: Marsfield and the Aventine. Both districts reflect a potentially higher social status than Trastevere and Porta Capena. The area underneath the St. Prisca Church in the Aventine has been excavated, revealing large patrician homes that date from the time Paul wrote Romans.

Four of the five groups known to Paul according to chapter 16 lack patrons, and therefore it requires a revision of the prevailing concept of house churches, because most of the population in these districts lived in crowded *insula* buildings.

Yet one of the standard studies of house congregations and house churches by Hans-Josef Klauck and other significant researchers conclude that the earliest Christians met in private homes.

Apartment housing can be divided into two groups: Lower-class is characterized by rooms 100-115 square meters. Luxury apartments had a total floor area of 150-300

square meters. This kind of “vertical zoning” appears to have been typical, and the overall population density is estimated to be 300 per acre in the residential quarters of Rome, almost two-and-a-half times higher than modern Calcutta and three times higher than Manhattan Island. This raised a valid question since it seems likely that house churches as normally conceived could not find space in the upper floors of such tenements when the rooms were that small.

House church congregations ranged from 10-40 members.³⁹ Tenement buildings might accommodate a group of 10-20 believers.

Churches that were built after the time of Constantine were located for the most part on the site of buildings that had been owned by Christian patrons and patronesses where house churches had earlier been established.

The perception that the greetings are in a rather random sequence is correct, although others have tried to establish a sequence that moved from close personal friends

³⁹In all the research evaluated, house church congregation size ranged from ten to the mid forties. Only in one isolated case did Kwabena Donkor, associate director of the Biblical Research Institute suggest a congregation of 120 members who gathered on an ongoing basis in an upper room was a house church. A distinction between a single house church and house church gatherings where multiple house churches would come together would have brought clarification. Barbero brings clarification when he says, “The gatherings of Christians in house churches were not large, numbering probably between ten and forty people, but we cannot rule out larger gatherings. There is also evidence that in Corinth there were several house churches that got together on some occasions (cf. 1 Cor 14:23). Gaius is believed to have been a wealthy owner of a large house where other house churches would join together on special occasions (Rom 16:23). Barbero, 187. For Donkor to say that a house church of 120 met on a regular basis might be a stretch. Kwabena Donkor, “New Testament House Churches: A Phenomenological Account” Email to me by Mark Finley prior to a published article, Kwabena Donkor, “New Testament House Churches: A Model for Today’s Complex World?” *Ministry* (April 2008): 5-7.

to lesser known individuals and groups. This random sequence reveals an intent to place all the Christian persons and groups in Rome on an equal footing.

Verse analysis

Verse one: Phoebe is a leader in the church. Paul asks people to receive her with high honor because she has helped Paul and many others in their time of need. Jewett comments,

The host or hostess of house churches was usually a person of high social standing and means, with a residence large enough for the church to gather, who presided over the eucharistic celebrations and was responsible for the ordering of the congregation. The fact that Paul mentions Phoebe as a patroness “to many, and also to me” indicated the level of material resources that would support this kind of leadership role. In light of her high social standing, and Paul’s relatively subordinate social position as her client, it is mistaken to render *prostatis* as “helper” or to infer some kind of subordinate role.⁴⁰

Phoebe is most likely the carrier of this letter and shouldered a large responsibility in building support for Paul’s arrival and for Paul’s goal of collecting funds for the Spanish mission.⁴¹

Verse five: “Please give my greetings to the church that meets in their house” (Rom 16:5). Where there might be questions regarding house churches, this is one of four New Testament passages clearly articulating that a local congregation met in a house. Jewett, along with numerous others, similarly concludes that private homes were the center of church life for the early church. Jewett quotes others to say, “the atrium-house is

⁴⁰Jewett, 947.

⁴¹Rom 15:24, 28. “Phoebe’s primary task would thus be to present the letter to the various congregations in Rome and discuss its contents and implications with church leaders.” Ibid., 90.

surely not the exclusive but is the primary setting for Pauline *ekklesia*, which did not meet primarily in apartment buildings.”⁴²

Verse seven: “Then there are Andronicus and Junia, my relatives, who were in prison with me. They are respected among the apostles and became Christians before I did.” There has been much debate with respects to the name Junia. Jewett is not alone in his conclusion.

The modern scholarly controversy over this name rest on the presumption that no woman could rank as an apostle, and thus that the accusative form must refer to a male by the name Junias or Junianus. However, the evidence in favor of the feminine name “Junia” is overwhelming. Not a single example of a masculine name “Junias” has been found. The patristic evidence investigated by Fabrega and Fitzmyer indicates that commentators down through the twelfth century refer to Junia as a woman, often commenting on the extraordinary gifts that ranked her among the apostles.⁴³

A different view of women in leadership begins to emerge. Phoebe, a deacon, has already been noted. Verse three says, “Greet Priscilla and Aquila.” This greeting shows up multiple times in the New Testament (Acts 18; Rom 16; 1 Cor 16; and 2 Tim 4). And now in verse seven, Junia, who is likely married to Andronicus is recognized as an apostle, as argued by a number of scholars. “The honorific expression *episamoi en tois apostolois* should be translated “outstanding among the apostles rather than “remarkable in the judgment of the apostles,” because the adjective *episamos* lifts up a person or thing as distinguished or marked in comparison with other representatives of the same class, in this instance with the other apostles.”⁴⁴

⁴²Jewett, 959.

⁴³Ibid., 961.

⁴⁴Ibid., 963.

It is evident that in New Testament house churches, women carried significant leadership roles and responsibilities.

Verse ten and eleven are very interesting. Verse 10b says, “And give my best regards to members of the household of Aristobulus,” an expression indicating the patron is himself not a Christian, but that some slaves who are part of his household have formed a congregation. But because of the social network, they are recognized by their household patron. In verse 11b we find the same type of reference, “Greet the Christians in the household of Narcissus.” In the exegesis of 16:3-16, “a case is made that these two groups are parts of the imperial bureaucracy, probably meeting in the building where they work.”⁴⁵

In verse twelve: “Say hello to Tryphena and Tryphosa, the Lord’s workers, and to dear Persis, who has worked so hard for the Lord.” Scholars point out that these three ladies are taking important leadership roles in the New Testament.⁴⁶

Verse fourteen lists a group of names: “And please give my greetings to Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers and sisters who are with them.” Most will agree, based on the background of their names, that these people are the leaders of separate congregations, but it is not appropriate to call these congregations house churches. It is more accurate to see this group of leaders gathering their “tenement church” in one of the multi-storied buildings where slaves and the lower-

⁴⁵Ibid., 65.

⁴⁶Ibid., 968.

class lived.⁴⁷ This means that their congregations will be smaller and reflect a group of people who are caring for each other because they do not have a more well-to-do patron, or patroness, to provide a home and the normal hospitality items. Scholars agree with this when Jewett records,

In Lieu of a patron who could provide the means for the common meal, this group, like many others in the early church, would have to rely on ‘agapaic communalism’ by pooling resources from the earnings of the members. Although its structure and ethos were very different from a standard house church such as that led by Priscilla and Aquila, Paul asks for them to be greeted and welcomed as equals.⁴⁸

Verse twenty-three brings in new considerations that are of import to house church life. First it is important to realize that in the preceding verses Paul is sending greetings to those in Rome. In this verse, Paul is sending greetings from those who are “with him” in Corinth.⁴⁹ “Gaius says hello to you. I am his guest and the church meets here in his home.” This translation would lead one to believe we are talking about another typical house church. The NIV and NKJV both capture what is going on. “Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings.” This seems to be a gathering of the whole church, meaning multiple, if not all the house churches getting together for some special occasion. This also provides solid internal evidence that there was a plurality of house churches in one geographic location. Gehring expounds on this,

⁴⁷Ibid., 971.

⁴⁸Ibid., 972.

⁴⁹“That the epistle was written from Corinth is indicated by his references to Gaius (Rom. 16:23; cf. 1 Cor. 1:14) and Erastus (Rom. 16:23; cf. 2 Tim. 4:20) and by his commendation of Phoebe, whom Paul describes as rendering special service to the church at Cenchreae, the eastern seaport of Corinth (Rom. 16:1).” “Historical Setting,” *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1953-1957), 6:467.

“Some of the most significant results are (a) proof that, in addition to the gathering of the whole church (Rom 16:23; 1 Cor 14:23), we find a plurality of smaller house churches in Corinth and (b) the demonstration of a probable plurality of house churches in Rome (Rom 16).”⁵⁰ Barbero is also in agreement when he writes that Gaius is believed to have been a wealthy owner of a large house where other house churches would join together on special occasions (Rom 16:23).

Now let us turn attention to our second passage of interest, 1 Cor 16:19.

1 Corinthians 16:19

“The Churches here in the province of Asia⁵¹ greet you heartily in the Lord, along with Aquila and Priscilla and all the others who gather in their home for church meetings.”

Jewett counts between

six and ten groups of believers in Corinth that are reflected in NT evidence: Crispus’s house (Acts 18:8); Stephanus’s house (1 Cor 1:16; 16:15-18); the house of “Chloe’s people” (1 Cor 1:11); Phoebe’s church in neighboring Cenchraea (Rom 16:1-2); the house of Erastus (Rom 16:23); the members of Prisca and Aquila’s church that remained in Corinth after their departure; those who say “I belong to Paul” (1 Cor 1:12); those who say “I belong to Apollos” (1 Cor 1:12); those who say “I belong to Cephas” (1 Cor 1:12); and those who say “I belong to Christ” (1 Cor 1:12).⁵²

This again affirms the plurality of house churches in a given geographic location, and the existence of at least a second house church in the New Testament.

⁵⁰Gehring, 9.

⁵¹Asia was a Roman province in what is now western Turkey.

⁵²Jewett, 980.

Colossians 4:15

“Please give my greetings to our Christian brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and those who meet in her house.” Most scholars agree with Marianne Meye Thompson, in her commentary, *Colossians & Philemon*, that since Paul is asking the Colossians to greet Christians in Laodicea, this suggests that the Laodicean community is made up of more than one house church.⁵³ And although we do not know why Nympha and the congregation that meets in her house are singled out for special greeting, we do know from other Pauline letters that women served important roles of teaching and leadership in the church.⁵⁴ It is also believed that Nympha is a Christian of some means for her house to be used as a meeting place. And unique to this passage, this is the only epistolary text where a woman, by herself, is named as the patroness of a house church.⁵⁵

Thompson, commenting on the greeting found in Philemon, which we will turn to next, draws a comparison and conclusion from the two greetings. “A similar reference in Col 4:15 to ‘Nympha and the church in her house’ attributes to her the same position here assigned to Philemon.”⁵⁶ This again, supports the equal role that women played in the New Testament church. This passage also confirms a third New Testament house church.

⁵³Marianne Meye Thompson, *Colossians & Philemon*, The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2005), 7.

⁵⁴Phoebe (Rom 16:1-2); Priscilla (Rom 16:3-5; 1 Cor 16:19); Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis (Rom 16:12).

⁵⁵Barbero, 188.

⁵⁶Thompson, 209.

Philemon

Much could be said and explored with reference to Philemon and “the church that meets in your house.” Not only is this the only New Testament book where a house church is included in the opening greeting, as compared to the closing greeting, this book gives us a glimpse of the level of accountability that Paul encourages among a given congregation.

Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, in their commentary *The Letter to Philemon*, get to the issues,

Therefore, at the time of Paul, the appeal to the house church made in Philemon 2 was almost revolutionary innovation. It makes the personal letter to Philemon an official letter, regarding a public, political, and economical issue. PHM announces an invasion of privacy and reveals that every distinction and separation of personal from social matters contradicts Paul’s thought and intention. In other words: Paul’s ethics is social ethics.⁵⁷

Philemon opens by addressing three people and one house church, namely Philemon, Apphia, and Archippus,⁵⁸ and “the church that meets in your home.” In short, Paul is giving a heart appeal to Philemon that he accept his runaway slave,⁵⁹ Onesimus, back. And he should do so, not on the grounds of and with the consequences of the Roman law, but on the grounds of a fellow believer in Christ, and so Paul writes, “That is

⁵⁷Barth and Blanke, 263.

⁵⁸A brief note on the Opening greeting found in Phil 1:1, “It is written to all of God’s people in Philippi, who believe in Christ Jesus, and to the elders and deacons.” “Given the plurality of house churches at any one location with householders as their hosts and leaders, it can be assumed that the overseers mentioned in Philippians 1:1 were the leaders of house churches in the city of Philippi.” Gehring, 298.

⁵⁹Phil 15, “Perhaps you could think of it this way: Onesimus ran away for a little while so you could have him back forever. He is no longer just a slave, he is a beloved brother especially to me.”

why I am boldly asking a favor of you. I could demand it in the name of Christ because it is the right thing for you to do, but because of our love, I prefer just to ask you. So take this as a request from your friend Paul, an old man, now in prison for the sake of Christ Jesus (Phil 8-9).

Paul could have written this as a private letter but he includes the entire house church. With the entire house church included in the introduction, everyone is “encouraged and entitled to participate in the slave owner’s decision.”⁶⁰ Thompson agrees,

“Paul’s personal address to Philemon in the context of the larger community flies in the face of the insistence on privacy that is so great a part of the fabric of Western societies and churches. Paul assumes . . . that the church has the right and obligation to be concerned in the personal affairs of its members. Such an assumption indirectly exhibits Paul’s understanding of the unity of the body of Christ, as well as the accountability which members have to each other.” Not only is Philemon responsible for his Christian conduct but Paul invites the entire house church to hold him accountable for his actions.⁶¹

There are three pieces of internal evidence that support Paul’s intentions of this letter being given to the house church. Verse 3 says, “May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.” “You” is plural. Verse twenty-two continues with the plural form of “you.” “Please keep a guest room ready for me, for I am hoping that God will answer your prayers and let me return to you soon.” Both the “your” and the “you” are plural, indicating that this letter was indeed intended for the house church.⁶²

⁶⁰Barth and Blanke, 113.

⁶¹Thompson, 210.

⁶²Ibid., 227.

Summary

These four New Testament passages provide a number of helpful insights regarding the New Testament house/tenement churches: (1) there were multiple house/tenement church locations in one geographical area; (2) people were seen as equal, regardless of their social and economical standing, or gender; (3) women as well as men played significant leadership and apostleship roles; (4) churches were raised up wherever possible: houses, apartments, and possibly store-front spaces; (5) the people cared for each other—less so with a patron or patroness, and more so with tenement churches; (6) on occasion the “whole church” gathered for special events; (7) congregations were called to a higher Kingdom value system as they related to one another; and (8) accountability for one’s actions was, to a degree, the business of the congregation.

Some may wonder why so much attention has been given in this chapter to the leadership roles of women in the New Testament. This author did not approach the biblical text with any agenda/thought for women in mind, and was quite surprised at the frequency in which significant leadership was provided by women, both in house church settings as well as in apostolic leadership. This discovery both confirms and encourages the use of women in significant leadership roles in house church movements today.

Worship Elements Observed in the New Testament

What is worship? Much has been said and written about worship. The purpose of this survey is to observe identifiable ingredients that make up New Testament congregational worship.

There seems to be four basic elements that stand out in forming the basic skeleton

of New Testament life. Acts 2:42 captures these elements, “They joined with other believers and devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, sharing in the Lord’s Supper and in prayer.”

It is interesting that these four elements carry with them a mixture of both “doing” and “being.” Donkor says it in more absolute terms when he says,

Acts 2:42 provides a list which seems to indicate an agenda for an early Christian worship. The list includes teaching, fellowship, breaking bread and prayer. In thinking about this issue we need to remind ourselves that these are needful activities in the worship experience of any religious community. Apart from the house the only other place of assembly for the believers was the temple. But it is unthinkable that these activities of worship could have happened in the temple. Therefore, it is fair to conclude that the believers consciously saw the houses as their churches and undertook the worship service there.⁶³

Although Donkor does not address the role of the Synagogue, others point out that the synagogue-style worship service contained similar elements.

Christians have inherited their pattern of worship from the Jewish synagogues, not the temple, says Dr. Met Castillo. The Jewish teacher Rabinowitz has identified five elements in synagogue worship: invitation to worship with hymns and a formal call to worship; prayers and petitions; Scripture lessons; an address based on the Scripture lesson; conclusion with benedictions. As Christian worship became more and more formal in Christian church houses⁶⁴—rather than house churches—after Constantine, the

⁶³Donkor, 5-7.

⁶⁴“In his dissertation White undertook the massive task of collecting and cataloging the entire archaeological, literary, and documentary data and sources for early Christian gatherings places during the first three centuries. In his study he examines all of the data and sources. His primary focus, however, is on the architectural development of general patterns for the construction of early Christian assembly places, paying particular attention to their religious and social settings (e.g., in the *oikos*) from the Pauline house churches up until the Constantinian basilica. The point of departure for White’s study is the acknowledgment of two landmarks in the architectural development of the setting for early Christian meeting places: (a) by the middle of the first century, the first Pauline Christians began gathering in small groups in the private homes belonging to individual members of the congregation; (b) in contrast to the primitive period, 250 year later we find that a basilical or monumental architecture had become normative (early fourth

basic Jewish synagogue pattern was revived and inherited, with the addition of saying the creed. The church thus fell back into legalistic and ritualistic patterns of worship which would remain almost unchanged during the following centuries, and became the agreed, sacrosanct style of meetings for Christians.⁶⁵

As extensively noted in the footnotes, there does seem to be a progression from “private house church” to “altered church house” to “monumental basilica.” And although disputed, some scholars make a good case for a rather abrupt implementation of

century in particular, after Constantine.)

. . . As already mentioned, White builds his case upon the research results of Krautheimer. Krautheimer drew upon a hypothesis borrowed from Ward-Perkins, which his own research then confirmed: The first formal Christian architecture for early Christian assembly came into existence with Constantine. It was implemented rather abruptly around 314 C.E. with the Lateran basilica. On the basis of his research, Krautheimer suggests an approximate periodization of the architectural development of houses used for Christian assembly for the NT era up until the basilica at the beginning of the fourth century (50-314 C.E.) In four phases:

In the first phase (ca. 50-150 C.E.), Christians met for worship in private homes of wealthy member of the congregation—in other words, in “house churches” (cf. The Lukan example in Acts). Such assemblies would have included a common meal and, for that reason, most likely took place in the living or dining rooms of these houses.

During the second phase (ca. 150-250), while some (poorer) congregations might have continued to meet in private homes, others structurally altered their homes and used them (primarily as property of the community) either in part or exclusively for their worship. . . . Krautheimer adopts the term *domus ecclesiae* (house of the church). . . . The *domus ecclesiae* is not the only architectural form in use during this period, but it is the dominant form.

In the third phase (ca. 250-313), the *domus ecclesiae* pattern is continued, but a gradual transition toward ever larger buildings and halls becomes apparent. The main example for this phase is the titulus S. Crisogono. (Footnote: . . . however, such large buildings are to be distinguished from the architecture of the Constantinian basilica, as they were neither basilical in form nor monumental in size (cf. White, *Building God’s House*, 20).

The fourth phase (313 and beyond) begins with the Constantinian revolution and the introduction of the Lateran basilica.” Gehring, 10-13.

⁶⁵Simson, 58-59.

the basilica around 314 C.E.⁶⁶ But much more significant to this architectural progression is the accompanying “ritualistic patterns of worship which would remain almost unchanged during the following centuries, and became the agreed, sacrosanct style of meetings for Christians.”

Although scholars usually identify four elements listed in Acts 2:42, this author would argue that there are five elements listed here with the fifth being, “joining together with believers.” This “joining together” is a desire for horizontal community but it is primary a collective “coming together in order to be together in the presence of Jesus.”⁶⁷

Based on this passage in Acts, Gehring boldly says, “it would be theologically legitimate to call house groups mentioned here house churches in the full sense.”⁶⁸ This

⁶⁶Although outside the scope of this dissertation, this abrupt change from house to basilicas does seem to fit Constantine’s contribution to Christianity as he attempts to make Christianity as attractive to paganism as possible. In doing so he seems to make at least three changes that in and of them selves may not seem significant but when combined, the interconnected results have at least contributed to the state of Christianity in the Western world, and may soon be to follow in other countries.

These three changes could be described as follows: (1) Seventh-day Adventist evangelists carefully provide historical documentation of Constantine changing the Sabbath to Sunday which we say took place at approximately the same time period, 313-314, (2) the change from house to basilica which has been addressed, and (3) with the introduction of basilicas comes the introduction of professional priests, stemming from the pagan priests that are already in place and which have paved the way for Protestant Christianities professional pastors. For more information see Russell Burrill’s book called, *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life & Mission of the Local Church*. Read chapter seven, “The Role of the Clergy in Early Adventism.”

More work needs to be done in researching the context of historical documents Adventists evangelists use to establish Constantine’s change of the Sabbath to Sunday to ascertain the accompanying context of Constantine’s work in changing the house to the basilica and the lay-led to professional priests/pastors.

⁶⁷Simson, 141.

⁶⁸Gehring, 80.

makes sense if the church is the people. When God’s people gather, they are the ones who make it the church.

Gehring adds two additional insights with regards to house church worship. “The house church enabled the followers of Jesus to have a *distinctively* Christian worship⁶⁹ and fellowship from the very first days of the apostolic age.”⁷⁰ One of four/five elements found in Acts 2:42, “sharing in the Lord’s Supper,” was not and would not become part of the synagogue service. It celebrated Christ’s death, rest, and resurrection. This was “present truth” for the church—the people of God. For God’s mission to continue, “new wine skins,” a new expression, was developed that provided freedom to “obey everything I’ve commanded you,” namely, “do this in remembrance of me.”

More passages could be explored.⁷¹ But here in the book of Acts, as a skeletal outline, one finds five elements of worship: joining together with believers, devotion to the apostles’ teachings, fellowship, sharing in the Lord’s Supper, and prayer. But at the risk of, like in ages gone by, settling into a ritualistic worship that contains a “form of Godliness,” the counsel of Ellen White proves helpful: “True worship consists in working

⁶⁹Jewett confirms, “The Roman synagogues were primarily didactic in their function, and although there may have been occasional prayers, their function was not that of worship.” Jewett, 56.

⁷⁰Gehring, 3.

⁷¹Barbero includes an extended list of elements observed in Luke and Acts and reveals the far-reaching role the house churches played as the nucleus of early Christian communities: proclamation, teaching, worship, prayer, fasting, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, healing, revelations and visions, and a place for distribution of goods to the needy. Barbero, 221-222.

Additional passages might include Eph 5:19; Col 3:16; 1 Cor 14; 1 Cor 11:23-38, etc.

together with Christ. Prayers, exhortation and talk are cheap fruits which are frequently tied on, but fruits that are manifested in good works, in caring for the needy, the fatherless, and widows, are genuine fruits, and grow naturally upon a good tree.”⁷²

Summary

This chapter has addressed three areas: theology of mission, four passages where greetings are sent to specific house churches, and worship elements observed in the early church.

When God thinks mission He thinks creation. Because of a fallen creation He sent Jesus on a mission and as *the* mission. Before Jesus returns to heaven He invents the church, people who accept and follow Him, to be an extension of His mission, and He sends the Holy Spirit to empower His people to both “be” and to “show;” to be the kingdom of priests, God’s holy nation and all that encompasses this high calling; and to show others the goodness of God by being the people God intended His church to be. As this happens, unbelieving neighbors come to believe because of what they see in the everyday lives of the believers.

Seventh-day Adventists have been called out to share a special message with the world. Adventists have been called to be like Christ, and to labor as Christ did: mingling with people, sympathizing with people, ministering to their needs, winning their confidence, and then bidding them to accept and follow the Everlasting Gospel of Jesus Christ (Rev 14).

⁷²Ellen White, *Counsels on Stewardship* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1940), 96.

Four biblical passages with some of their surrounding context, include greetings to specific New Testament house churches. Yet there is significant evidence that a plurality of house churches existed.

Acts 2:42 captures five skeletal worship elements observed in the early church: joining together with believers, devotion to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, sharing in the Lord's Supper, and prayer. But a mere mechanical out-play of these elements misses the heart of what worship is, as is captured by this early Anabaptist Hymn.⁷³

What is this place where we are meeting?

Only a house, the earth its floor, walls and a roof sheltering people, windows for light, an open door.

Yet it becomes a body that lives when we are gathered here, and know our Lord is near.

Words from afar, stars that are falling, sparks that are sown in us like seed.

Names for our God, dreams, signs and wonders, sent from the past are what we need.

We in this place remember and speak again what we have heard:

God's free redeeming word.

And we accept bread at his table, broken and shared, a living sign.

Here in this world, dying and living, we are each other's bread and wine.

This is the place where we can receive what we need to increase:

God's justice and God's peace.

⁷³Originally published in Valerius's *Neder-landische gedenck-klanck* (Zurich: n.p., 1626). An early collection of Anabaptist hymns. Quoted in Banks and Banks, 55.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this chapter we will look at three areas: (1) North American house church networks, (2) characteristics of house churches, (3) characteristics of church planting movements, and (4) a brief overview of the differences between house churches and cell churches.

North American house church networks will be reviewed to assess common characteristics of their functional structures, leadership, and general makeup. Then attention will be given to the house churches that make up these networks as well as house churches that are not connected with a network. Lastly, church planting movements will be explored in an attempt to identify key elements as they would relate to house churches.

Footnotes will contain observations and comments regarding house church and house church network characteristics as they relate to Simple Church and the Adventist Simple Church Network.

House Church Networks in North America

A number of house church networks have recently mushroomed in North America. House churches usually develop without much fanfare. Because of this few are

even noticed, making them difficult for researchers to locate.

According to Payne, Mike Steele, who oversees DAWN (Discipling a Whole Nation), is credited as the house church and house church network monitor in North America.¹ Yet, it is Payne who claims, “As of the present we have undertaken the largest study of North American evangelistic house churches.”² Even so, Payne has had difficulty actually locating them. “Because of the difficulty locating [house] churches for our study,” he noted, “we were unable to take representative samples from the various regions of North America. Despite this situation, we did have participants from the East, Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, Southwest, Northwest, West, and Pacific regions. Unfortunately, no Canadian churches were represented in our findings.”³ But that does not mean they do not exist. Twenty-eight house church networks span six of the ten provinces in Canada.⁴

Even though house church networks are in some ways difficult to monitor, Larry Kreider says, “Within the next ten to fifteen years, I believe that new house church networks will dot the landscape of North America just as they already do in other nations of the world.”⁵ It may be that Kreider’s “prediction” is coming true.

¹Payne, 12.

²Ibid., 6.

³Ibid., 46.

⁴DiscipleTheNations.org, “Location of Canadian Regional House Church Networks,” 2009, <http://disciplethenations.org/index53.html> (accessed February 2, 2009).

⁵Larry Kreider, *House Church Networks* (Ephrata: PA, House to House Publications, 2001), n.p., quoted in <http://www.simplechurchjournal.com/2004/03/index.html> (accessed September 17, 2008).

Most of the networks listed below were gathered from a variety of written documentation. Google searching on each reference was limited to the first page of results. House church networks that function as cell churches (even though they are called house churches), as well as networks that do not have a web presence, are listed in this footnote.⁶ Following is a list of networks, with a brief description. Depending on information gleaned, some descriptions are very brief, while others include a broader description. Appendix F provides detailed information on a number of these house church networks.

Upon closer investigation of the house churches which listed their web pages, it was quickly observed that the term “house church” is a popular word that many are wanting to use in hopes of attracting people to their ministry. This is to be expected, as was the case with the terms “small group” and “cell church.” In a few cases, “house church” web pages contained much of the form and feel as do traditional churches, but they have used house church terminology. As of this writing, a minimum of 25-30 house church networks can easily be identified, with 5-25 individual house churches in each

⁶Ohio, Cincinnati, Kevin Raines and Dave Nixon, www.vineyardcentral.com. Although called a house church network, Raines and Nixon function more like a cell church. Offers Sunday morning celebrations with a sermon, and mid-week house churches. As of 2007 there were about 20 “micro-churches.”

Las Vegas, Joe Boyd and Greg Hubbard, www.apexchurch.org. Apex, like Vineyard Central gathers for Sunday services and mid-week meetings. This is more in line with a cell church structure.

Washington, Seattle, Johnathan Campbell. It is reported that Campbell runs a house church network that spans several states, including Orlando, FL; Boise, ID; and Kitsap County, WA.

Northwest, Harold and Wendy Behr. It is reported that Behr has 20-25 organic churches all over the Pacific Northwest. No web page was found, but there are 4 blogs with the most recent entries being March 2006.

network. But not all house churches connect or even register with a network. According to Lauri Goodstein's article in *The New York Times*, as many as 1,600 groups in all fifty states are listed on various web sites as of 2001;⁷ while Rita Healy and David Van Biema have set numbers from 50,000 into the millions.⁸ It was unclear if Healy and Biema's numbers refer to the house churches or to the people meeting in the house churches. It could easily refer to actual house churches, if George Barna's number of twenty million people who have left the typical church in North America⁹ is accurate.

We now turn our focus to the characteristics of both the house churches and the networks to which some have connected.

House Church and House Church Network Characteristics

There are a number of characteristics, or disciplines, that exist in house churches and house church networks. But it would be a stretch to say that most networks share a common core collection of these characteristics. The variety might be represented, on one hand, as a free-for-all, on the other hand, as a highly structured cell church format which has adopted the house church terminology. A few characteristics are summarized below. Additional characteristics are explored in appendix G.

Relational Evangelism: It could be said that this one element is foundational and

⁷Laurie Goodstein, "Search for the Right Churches Ends at Home," *The New York Times*, Late Edition (April 29, 2001), Section 1, pg. 1, quoted in Payne, 13.

⁸Rita Healy and David Van Biema, "Why Home Churches Are Filling Up," *Time*, online, February 27, 2006, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1167737-1,00.html> (accessed March 6, 2006), quoted in Payne, 13.

⁹Barna, *Revolution*, 13.

exists in most, if not all, house churches. Whenever people numbers are smaller, it is natural for those people to become more relational and intimate with each other socially, as well as in their styles of evangelism.

House Church Finances: The average church in the United States will spend as much as 64 percent of its budget on staff salaries. Additionally, it will spend as much as 30 percent of its offerings on maintaining its building.¹⁰ Other researchers say a minimum of 82 percent of church financial resources are spent on themselves. That means that somewhere between 82 and 96 percent¹¹ is spent on buildings and maintenance. “With house churches the percentages are reversed!”¹² With this reversal, more financial resources can be put into helping people in need, a value that is seen throughout house churches.

Age of Participants: Most house churches, according to Payne, fell in the 19-35 year-olds which were followed by those under 18 year of age group, the 36-50 year-olds, and the 51-65 year-olds.¹³

Harvest Statistics: Statistics can be touchy. Some background to Payne’s research will be helpful before looking at ratios.

¹⁰William Tenny-Brittian, *House Church Manual* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2005), 67-68.

¹¹Steve Atkerson, ed., *Ekklesia: To the Roots of Biblical Church Life* (Atlanta, GA: New Testament Restoration Foundation, 2005), 86, quoted in Kreider and McClung, 107.

¹²Kreider and McClung, 107.

¹³Payne, 51. This age breakdown reflects the Simple Church Network being developed under the Adventist Church.

In North America, 255 house church leaders participated in our initial web-based survey. Of these, 146 churches experienced at least one baptism in the previous year, and 123 planted at least one church within the past three years. Obviously, we praised the Lord for these churches and what they were doing to make disciples. However, on further examination we determined that 91 churches baptized at least one person in the previous year *and* planted at least one other church within the previous three years.¹⁴

Of the 255 North American church leaders who participated in our web-based survey, ninety-one churches met both research criteria. Out of these ninety-one churches represented, we contacted thirty-three leaders to participate in our study.¹⁵

This background provides a context to three significant pieces of evidence that Payne discovered.

First:

In our study, the average membership/attendance-to-baptism ratio of the house churches ranged from 4.3:1 to 2.3:1. At the high end of the range, these churches were baptizing one person per year for every 4.3 members/attendees. At the low end of the range, for every 2.3 members/attendees, one baptism was witnessed.

The gravity of these numbers should not be passed over casually. *Ratios of this size automatically place these churches among the lowest baptismal ratios in the world. Any traditional congregations manifesting such numbers would automatically be considered the most effective evangelistic churches in North America.*¹⁶

Second:

The average number of churches planted by all thirty-three congregations was surprising. Each of the thirty-three churches planted on average of four to five new churches. This average represents more than one church plant per church per year for the past three years. Over three years, these churches combined planted approximately 132 to 198 churches. *These numbers alone place such congregations in the highest category of church planting churches in North America.*¹⁷

¹⁴Payne, 58-59.

¹⁵Ibid., 15.

¹⁶Ibid., 75.

¹⁷Ibid., 78.

Third:

These congregations had not only outstanding baptismal [and church planting] ratios, but they also had outstanding percentages of conversion growth occurring. In the thirty-three churches in our study, the average percentage of new believers in each congregation was between 24 percent and 43 percent.¹⁸

Although these are outstanding numbers, one must keep in mind that 255 churches initially participated in the web-based survey. Ninety-one qualified, and Payne chose 33 churches to participate in his research. That leaves 222 house-churches that Payne did not consider in his research.

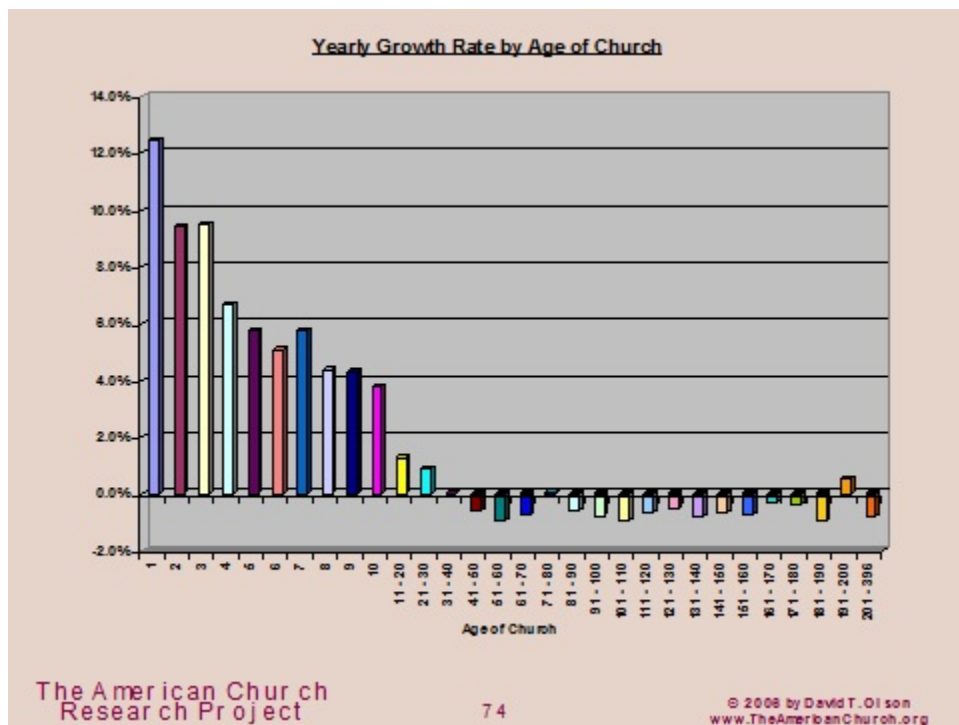
One observation that is consistent with Payne's research and David Olson's research is that younger congregations, whether they be house churches or traditional churches, have a higher growth rate than older congregations.¹⁹ Olson does not delineate

¹⁸Ibid., 75.

¹⁹The American Church Research Project, *The State of the American Church 2006*, by David T. Olson, 2006, <http://www.TheAmericanChurch.org>, see chart on next page.

the source of this growth, but based on a general reading of his book, *The American Church in Crisis*, he persuasively argues for planting more churches, because they do a better job of reaching the harvest. Kreider and McClung concur when they say, “Fuller Theological Seminary did a research study that found that if a church is 10 or more years old, it takes 85 people to lead 1 person to Christ. If a church is less than 3 years old, it takes only 3 people to lead 1 person to Christ.”²⁰

Ethnic Background: Payne accurately had assumed that many congregations would be predominately Caucasian. Yet, ethnic diversity represented in the churches



As of this writing, which represents eight months, a total of three plants have occurred; six people have been baptized; and on average 36 percent of adult attendance are unchurched people. Baptism/attendee ratios are harder to calculate because attendance started with 4 adults and 5 children eight months ago and has grown to 60 people: approximately 39 adults and 21 children.

²⁰Kreider and McClung, 30.

surprised him. “Less than one-third of the leaders surveyed noted that their congregations were 100 percent Caucasian. The majority of the churches were ethnically diverse.”²¹

House Church Eldership: Kreider and McClung point out that “in Acts 14:23, elders were commissioned for every church, whereas in Titus 1:5, elders were appointed in every city. Some house churches now have elders in each house, modeled after Acts 14:23; while others receive leadership from elders in the Net, modeled after Titus 1:5.”²² There seems to be no predominate leaning among house churches.²³

Denominational House Church Networks

Both Seventh-day Adventist and other denominational models will be included.

Southern Baptist Model

The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), leads the way among denominations in terms of proactively embracing the house church paradigm. Not only is the paradigm used in numerous cultural contexts around the world, but it is being used to specifically reach

²¹Payne, 48. Simple Church has seen a Caucasian majority in both attendees and CORE4 leadership, yet all Simple Churches experience ethnic diversity in both attendees and CORE4 leadership. This diversity is welcomed as a wonderful blessing and a taste of what Heaven will be like.

²²Kreider and McClung, 150.

²³Simple Church commissions CORE4 planting teams “for the work they have been called too.” This commissioning includes a laying on of hands. As a CORE4, they are appointed as the leaders of the new house church plant. For all practical purposes, the Simple Church Network considers CORE4 to be elders. But in the case of a lady not wanting to be recognized by the conference as an elder, we honor her request. CORE4 are not called elders.

those within an American cultural context.²⁴

The Southern Baptist house-church model contains several elements:

The house church begins with a group of five to six baptized believers who are rooted in the Baptist distinctives: believer's baptism by immersion, regenerate church membership, and congregationalism²⁵

They begin to view themselves as a church, and covenant with one another to be a church. This covenant is fundamental in determining the manner in which the congregational church organizes itself. "This means that each house church is a church in the fullest sense, and is not dependent on any other entity or organization in matters pertaining to the church."²⁶

As Atkinson has outlined, Southern Baptists do have some non-negotiable distinctives. Yet the congregationalist flavor allows for a much higher level of local church polity. Although this is more characteristic of the SBC than it is reflective of house churches within the SBC, it also tends to be more characteristic of house churches in general. Atkinson would argue that Southern Baptist house churches need to be self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating.

²⁴James A. Atkinson, "House Church: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Analysis of Selected Aspects of Wolfgang Simson's Ecclesiology from a Southern Baptist Perspective" (M.A. Theology thesis, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2006), 110.

²⁵"While this model represents the optimum definition of a church, it is necessary [to] note that a minimum definition exists. This definition still adheres to the aforementioned Baptist distinctive and the definition of church in the *BFM 2000*, but it recognizes that some churches may lack in certain areas." Atkinson, 112, Footnote 73, and 122.

²⁶Atkinson, 113.

Georgia-Cumberland Conference's Model

Through the leadership of Elder Bill Levin, the Georgia-Cumberland Conference (GCC), has pioneered²⁷ house churches in Seventh-day Adventist churches of North America.

GCC's document, "Research and Planning Report Regarding Implementation of the House Church Concept in the Georgia-Cumberland Conference," May 10, 2004, covers a number of items in their model. Most pertinent is the chapter called Organizational Structure for House Churches which are articulated in appendix H.

A number of house churches, house-church networks' characteristics, and two denominational house-church models have been observed. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list. But these observations help provide a wider perspective on the diversification of both house churches, house-church networks and models that exist in North America. It is not accurate to assume that a house-church network is a house-church movement.

Networks and Movements

In general, a network is made up of small units. But a network can become static, declining, or be growing and dynamic.

It seems that very few denominations have been as intentional in the creation of a

²⁷As of the writing of this document, Bill Levin currently serves as the Director of Global Missions for the Georgia-Cumberland Conference (GCC) from which all documentation and information was obtained upon request. As of April 2009, GCC has been developing house churches for five plus years. According to Bill Levin, there are seven house churches currently operating. Their pioneering work is greatly appreciated.

church planting movement as has been the International Mission Board (IMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC).

The house church emphasis of the IMB is more of a recent development in mission strategy. In 1998 the Overseas Leadership Team (OLT) adopted the following vision statement: “We will facilitate the lost coming to a saving faith in Jesus Christ by beginning and nurturing Church Planting Movements among all peoples.”²⁸

David Garrison lists ten elements that the IMB found present in every Church Planting Movement. “While it may be possible to have a Church Planting Movement without them, we have yet to see this occur. Any missionary intent on seeing a Church Planting Movement should consider these 10 elements.”²⁹

These Ten Universal Elements are as follows:³⁰

1. Prayer

Prayer has been fundamental to every Church Planting Movement we have observed. Prayer typically provides the first pillar in a strategy coordinator’s master plan for reaching his or her people group. However, it is the vitality of prayer in the missionary’s personal life that leads to its imitation in the life of the new church and its leaders. By revealing from the beginning the source of his power in prayer, the missionary effectively gives away the greatest resource he brings to the assignment. This sharing of the power source is critical to the transfer of vision and momentum from the missionary to the new local Christian leadership.

²⁸International Mission Board, SBC, “What Is a Church Planting Movement?” 2000, http://www.imb.org/globalresearch/CPM/what_is_a_cpm.htm (accessed April 21, 2006), quoted in Atkinson, 128. Also summarized in David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements: How God Is Redeeming a Lost World* (Midlothian, VA: WIGTake Resources, 2004), Preface.

²⁹David Garrison, “Church Planting Movements,” 33-36. <http://churchplantingmovements.com/download.php> (accessed February 4, 2009).

³⁰Ibid.

2. Abundant gospel sowing

We have yet to see a Church Planting Movement emerge where evangelism is rare or absent. Every Church Planting Movement is accompanied by abundant sowing of the gospel. The law of the harvest applies well: “If you sow abundantly you will also reap abundantly.” In Church Planting Movements, hundreds and even thousands of individuals are hearing the claims that Jesus Christ has on their lives. This sowing often relies heavily upon mass media evangelism, but it always includes personal evangelism with vivid testimonies to the life-changing power of the gospel. The converse to the law of the harvest is also true. Wherever governments or societal forces have managed to intimidate and stifle Christian witness, Church Planting Movements have been effectively eliminated.

3. Intentional church planting

In every Church Planting Movement, someone implemented a strategy of deliberate church planting before the movement got under way. There are several instances in which all the contextual elements were in place, but the missionaries lacked either the skill or the vision to lead a Church Planting Movement. However, once this ingredient was added to the mix, the results were remarkable. Churches don’t just happen. There is evidence around the world of many thousands coming to Christ through a variety of means without the resulting development of multiple churches. In these situations, an intentional church-planting strategy might transform these evangelistic awakenings into full-blown Church Planting Movements.

4. Scriptural authority

Even among nonliterate people groups, the Bible has been the guiding source for doctrine, church polity and life itself. While Church Planting Movements have occurred among peoples without the Bible translated into their own language, the majority had the Bible either orally or in written form in their heart language. In every instance, Scripture provided the rudder for the church’s life, and its authority was unquestioned.

5. Local leadership

Missionaries involved in Church Planting Movements often speak of the self-discipline required to mentor church planters rather than do the job of church planting themselves. Once a missionary has established his identity as the primary church planter or pastor, it’s difficult for him ever to assume a back-seat profile again. This is not to say that missionaries have no role in church planting. On the contrary, local church planters receive their best training by watching how the missionary models participate in Bible studies with non-Christian seekers. Walking alongside local church planters is the first step in cultivating and establishing local leadership.

6. Lay leadership

Church Planting Movements are driven by lay leaders. These lay leaders are typically bi-vocational and come from the general profile of the people group being reached. In other words, if the people group is primarily nonliterate, then the leadership shares this characteristic. If the people are primarily fishermen, so too are their lay leaders. As the movement unfolds, paid clergy [who function as network coordinators] often emerge. However, the majority—and growth edge of the movement—continue to be led by lay or bi-vocational leaders. This reliance upon lay leadership ensures the largest possible pool of potential church planters and cell church leaders. Dependence upon seminary-trained—or in nonliterate societies, even educated—pastoral leaders means that the work will always face a leadership deficit.

7. Cell or house churches

Church buildings do appear in Church Planting Movements. However, the vast majority of the churches continue to be small, reproducible cell churches of 10-30 members meeting in homes or storefronts. There is a distinction between cell churches and house churches. Cell churches are linked to one another in some type of structured network. Often this network is linked to a larger, single church identity. The Full Gospel Central Church in Seoul, South Korea, is perhaps the most famous example of the cell-church model with more than 50,000 individual cells. House churches may look the same as cell churches, but they generally are not organized under a single authority or hierarchy of authorities. As autonomous units, house churches may lack the unifying structure of cell churches, but they are typically more dynamic. Each has its advantages. Cell groups are easier to shape and guide toward doctrinal conformity, while house churches are less vulnerable to suppression by a hostile government. Both types of churches are common in Church Planting Movements, often appearing in the same movement.

8. Churches planting churches

In most Church Planting Movements, the first churches were planted by missionaries or by missionary-trained church planters. At some point, however, as the movements entered a multiplicative phase of reproduction, the churches themselves began planting new churches. In order for this to occur, church members have to believe that reproduction is natural and that no external aids are needed to start a new church. In Church Planting Movements, nothing deters the local believers from winning the lost and planting new cell churches themselves.

9. Rapid reproduction

Some have challenged the necessity of rapid reproduction for the life of the Church Planting Movement, but no one has questioned its evidence in every CPM. Most

church planters involved in these movements contend that rapid reproduction is vital to the movement itself. They report that when reproduction rates slow down, the Church Planting Movement falters. Rapid reproduction communicates the urgency and importance of coming to faith in Christ. When rapid reproduction is taking place, you can be assured that the churches are unencumbered by nonessential elements and the laity are fully empowered to participate in this work of God.

10. Healthy churches

Church growth experts have written extensively in recent years about the marks of a church. Most agree that healthy churches should carry out the following five purposes: 1) worship, 2) evangelistic and missionary outreach, 3) education and discipleship, 4) ministry and 5) fellowship. In each of the Church Planting Movements we studied, these five core functions were evident. A number of church planters have pointed out that when these five health indicators are strong, the church can't help but grow. More could be said about each of these healthy church indicators, but the most significant one, from a missionary vantage point, is the church's missionary outreach. This impulse within these CPM-oriented churches is extending the gospel into remote people groups and overcoming barriers that have long resisted Western missionary efforts.

Garrison includes in his next chapter a list of Ten Common Factors that are frequently, not universally, found. Although this author feels these are just as important as the Ten Universal Elements, the Ten Common Factors will be included in appendix I.

These universal principles and common factors according to IMB's observation, are challenging. Garrison continues to elaborate on these universal principles found in movements. In his expanded book he says, "House churches are characteristic of *every* Church Planting Movement."³¹ The past and the present speak clearly. By no means should the house-church model be overlooked today as a viable option for church growth. "It is a tried and tested approach."³²

Further research and reflection needs to happen with regards to the Adventist

³¹Ibid., 172. (Italics supplied.)

³²Ibid., 309.

movement in light of what David Garrison has discovered, which will hopefully lead to Kingdom growth.

Cell Church, A Close Cousin

What are the differences between holistic small groups, cell churches, and house churches? This is a valid question.

A cell church is a close cousin to a house church. This author would go as far as to say that cell churches prepared the ground, and helped lead the way, for house churches to once again be explored.

Although an in-depth look at cell churches would be outside the scope of this work, it is worth briefly highlighting a few of the differences between holistic small groups, cell churches, and house churches. See Appendix J.

Dr. Donald James, Professor at Andrews University, has pioneered the development of the cell church within the Adventist context. Those interested in delving into a deeper understanding of cell churches should read James's doctoral dissertation³³ where he chronicles significant baptismal growth, as well as other important discipleship characteristics, of cell church methodology.

Summary

We have surveyed the characteristics of (1) North American house-church

³³James's dissertation is listed in the bibliography.

networks, (2) house churches, (3) church-planting movements, and (4) cell church philosophy.

Many say that it is hard to track and evaluate house churches and house-church networks. It is difficult. Outside of denominational structures, registration of any network is a voluntary action. And due to a low-profile relational approach, house churches do not have a need to “advertise.” It is this author’s assumption that for every house church which does register individually or as part of a house-church network, there are many that remain low-profile, going about Kingdom work.

None-the-less, there is a ground swell of developing house churches that will significantly impact and shape the future of Christianity in North America. With many of these house church and house church networks becoming non-denominational, it is highly advisable that existing Christian denominations intentionally “make room” within their organizational structure for house churches to develop. Failing to acknowledge the development of house churches could be devastating for denominations who require their church structure to continue unaltered.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

In this chapter we will look at four areas: (1) Launching the First House Church, (2) Getting Started, (3) Sabbath Gathering Flow, and (4) Overcoming Obstacles.

Launching the First House Church

A Holy Discontent

In the fall of 2007, I accepted an invitation to help establish a new ASI lay-training school called the Lay Institute For Evangelism (LIFE) based in Orlando, Florida. Being associated with a school, I no longer had Sabbath pastoral responsibilities. For the first time in fifteen years, our weekends were mostly “open.”

Having spent eighteen months researching the trends of Christianity in North America (as described in chapter one), my wife, Brenda, and I decided there was no better opportunity than the present to become front-line missionaries in North America.

Some would question whether North America is a legitimate mission field. The October 9, 2008, issue of the *Adventist Review* asked this same question. On page 7 the caption read, “Where Is the Mission?” When the Adventist-to-population ratio of North America is compared to other Divisions, it becomes apparent that North America is,

ironically, a “new” mission field. Leonard Sweet says, “The greatest English speaking mission field in the world is North America.”¹

If I Were a Missionary

If I were a missionary to North America, what would I do? How would I proceed? Why would I persevere? And what does it mean to indigenize the Everlasting Gospel in our culture? These were some of the questions my wife and I were asking.

The bottom line questions for us became: How can we gain a hearing from the unchurched secular people in North America? How can we *authentically live* the Everlasting Gospel of Jesus Christ among them?

The promise, “Be careful how you live among your unbelieving neighbors. Even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will believe” (1 Pet 2:5-12), was either true or not true. The counsel we have been given about mingling, sympathizing, ministering to needs, winning confidence, and then bidding, was either true or not true.

Brenda and I knew we were at risk of short-cutting the process, and setting out to achieve a predetermined mental picture of what “church” and “Christianity” should look like. This we wanted to avoid, and Cray helped us avoid some common errors. “Those who start with the questions about the relationship to the existing Church have already made the most common and most dangerous mistake. Start with the Church and the

¹National Conference on Innovation, <http://www.veotag.com/player/?u=aaequpqfkx&tid=2ee15c29-5c71-43dc-bf49-f8109d263539> (accessed June 21, 2009).

mission will probably get lost. Start with mission and it is likely that the Church will be found.”²

Hirsch would agree with Cray. But Hirsch correctly adds Christology as foundational to the process.

Christology determines **Missiology** which determines **Ecclesiology**³

By my reading of the scriptures, ecclesiology is the most fluid of the doctrines. The church is a dynamic cultural expression of the people of God in any given place. Worship style, social dynamics, and liturgical expressions must result from the process of contextualizing the gospel in any given culture. *Church must follow mission.*⁴

Our driving question was, How does one indigenize the Everlasting Gospel of Jesus Christ? Christ had promised, “If I be lifted up I will draw all men unto me.” If this is true, then how, in the American culture, does one “lift up” Christ in a language and expression which secular unchurched people can understand? Our earnest prayer was, “God send us. But how do you want us to proceed?”

A Dream Is Born

Even though I had read the New Testament through several times, the significance of the following verses had not registered, given my tendency to make Scripture fit into my existing church paradigm.

²Cray, 116, quoted in Hirsch, 143. “The early Christians were not focused on the church but rather on following Jesus and doing His mission, and the church emerged from that.” Martin Robinson and Dwight Smith, *Invading Secular Space: Strategies for Tomorrow’s Church* (London: Monarch, 2003), 40.

³Hirsch, 143.

⁴Ibid.

“Please give my greetings to the church that meets in their home” (Rom 16:5).

“I am his guest, and the church meets here in his home” (Rom 16:23).

“And all the others who gather in their home for church meetings” (1 Cor 16:19).

“Please give my greetings to our Christian brothers and sisters, and to Nympha and those who meet in her house” (Col 4:15).

“This letter is from Paul. . . . I am also writing to the church that meets in your house” (Phil 1:1-3).

“On the Sabbath we went a little way outside the city to a riverbank, where we supposed that some people met for prayer, and we sat down to speak with some women who had come together” (Acts 16:13).

I had read these verses many times. But for the first time the light bulbs were being turned on, and a dream was born.

We accepted the timing of discovering these biblical passages as part of the answer to our question. It also made sense in light of how God had led me for the past twenty years in the development of Growth Groups⁵ to help my people, the Seventh-day Adventists, recapture the mission on which God has sent us. Although there had been significant progress, there were still a number of obstacles that Growth Groups was unable to overcome. The more I studied and reflected, the more I came to the conclusion that house churches naturally overcame many of these obstacles; so, it made sense to proceed in this direction.

It is important to note that prior to this stage of God’s leading, I was not aware of

⁵Visit www.GrowthGroups.us for more information.

the extensive interest and ground-swell that had been occurring in North America regarding house churches.

Pre-Launch Work

Being one month new to Florida, we were starting from scratch. That was January 2008. Prior to moving to Florida, I was scheduled to attend and present at the Festival of the Laity 2007, which was to be held in Orlando, Florida. While at this festival, I met a young man who came to my presentation. Anton was in his mid thirties, had a passion for reaching unchurched people, and was a natural networker.

Shortly after we arrived in Florida (January 2008), we reconnected.

Conference Invitation

I love my church and believe that part of my life work is to help my church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, spread the Everlasting Gospel. That is why I have committed to working from within my denomination.

In January I made an appointment with the Florida Conference President, Elder Michael Cauley. During our two-hour conversation, I shared my background, my experience with Growth Groups, and my dream for house churches in North America. I was amazed and encouraged to discover that he had read most of the same books I had read. Cauley asked several clarification questions, and then opened the door for house churches to be developed, using Florida Conference as the pilot conference.

The Florida Conference Executive Committee voted Simple Church on May 20, 2008.

Finding My CORE4⁶

I wish I could say this was all planned out. It was not.

Having recently completed the *Experiencing God* workbook by Henry Blackaby, my highly-organized and goal-oriented approach to life had been challenged to make more room for God to lead in my life. Doing my best to incorporate this, I simply asked God to show me how to find some people with whom to share this dream. It was Anton who called, “I have a group of friends who want to meet on any night, at any time and hear about this house church idea.” And that is how Simple Church started.

At that first orientation meeting, about nine people gathered in Elie’s home. Over the course of one hour I shared the following: (1) a summary of North American church trends and Seventh-day Adventist trends as outlined in chapter one; (2) I raised the question, If this is what is happening, how are we going to reach unchurched people? (3) We looked up the New Testament biblical house church passages and discussed them; and (4) I painted a picture of what an Adventist house church could look like, emphasizing that these house churches existed to reach unchurched people.

A second hour was open for questions and discussion.

⁶CORE4 house church planting teams consist of two Co-Leaders, one Host Coordinator, and one Details Coordinator. Together they carry equal responsibility of raising up a house church.

Co-Leaders tend to the spiritual direction and development of the house church. They usually facilitate the Sabbath gatherings.

Host Coordinators tend to the home setting, coordinate meals, meeting locations, and “warm fuzzies” that help people relax, feel safe and cared for.

Details Coordinators serve as assistants to the Conference Details Coordinator in the area of Clerk, Treasurer, and miscellaneous responsibilities.

Job descriptions are articulated in the Simple Church Network Guidelines.

At the end of this meeting I made available a yellow pad of paper. If a person wanted to become a house church planter, they were to write their name, cell phone, and email address. Seven of the nine people indicated their desire by listing their names. The next day I called those people and scheduled a time to meet in their homes with a group of friends they had invited to hear about house churches. We continued in this manner for the next three months, averaging one meeting per week, and eventually extending to five or six generations.

We accidently discovered that those who attended multiple orientation meetings had the best understanding of how to explain Simple Church. So we then asked people to attend three of these orientation meetings. After hearing my presentation several times, these individuals had the ability to share the dream without me being present.

During this time I was asked to speak on this topic at a relatively large Adventist church meeting in the Orlando area, to be followed by a potluck and a question/answer session in the afternoon. The message, *Our Mission or Just Wishen?* was video taped and is now part of the Simple Church online training. I basically preached the orientation meeting as a sermon. It was not until the afternoon question and answer session that I learned that the majority of the church was not as excited about the possibility of using house churches as a mission endeavor as I was. Three themes became very apparent: (1) we are trying to fill this church building, and house churches would take people away; (2) we need the offering to maintain our building and programs; and (3) it is not a good idea to have groups meeting without a professionally trained pastor.

I was unprepared for this and went home discouraged. A few days later Darren

called. Darren and his wife, Lori, have been longtime active members in the Adventist Church in which I has just spoke. Darren, age thirty-eight, has grown up in this church and was serving as an Elder. Lori was the church treasurer, and together they looked forward to seeing their two children grow up in their home church, not to mention that Sabbath was extra special with grandparents also attending the same church. He called to tell me that they wanted to get involved in planting a house church.

In the next couple months I would speak at two additional Adventist churches with similar responses. A few would express interest and would become involved, but the majority were primarily concerned with filling up their church, maintaining buildings and programs, and wanting a professional pastor.

Monthly CORE4 Meetings

Beginning in the fourth month (April, 2008) we began to hold monthly CORE4 church planting meetings, which I patterned after Growth Group monthly co-leaders meetings. We met at 4:00 p.m. The agenda was as follows: (1) Check-In, (2) Training, (3) Question/Answer Discussion, and (4) Supper.

Check-In is a time when each one responds to two questions focused on (1) How did they see God leading in their life, and (2) Had they completed the online Growth Groups training—Phase One.

Training, beyond Growth Groups, was being developed as we grew and was being added to the online Simple Church training web page. I would introduce the next part, Phase Two, of the training by highlighting its location on the web page. The following month at Check-In we learned who had completed the training.

Question/Answer Discussion covered a wide variety of items, but it was very beneficial in helping me recognize the next steps of development and training that needed to be put in place.

Supper was light—popcorn and apples, fruit salad, soup and salad, or bread and spreads. Everyone was asked to bring something.

At this stage of development, monthly CORE4 meetings were for anyone who had signed on the yellow pad, as well as anyone else who was interested and wanted to come. I encouraged people to begin talking together as they formed their CORE4 church planting teams.

It was during these weeks that Brenda and I asked Darren and Lori if they would like to join us in planting a house church. We were encouraged to learn they also had been praying about this; they were wanting to talk with us about the possibility, but were hesitant since I was the “leader.”

By the second CORE4 meeting in May, it was obvious to me it was time to launch. June 7, 2008, was the date set for our first house church gathering, which we named Simple Church.

Florida Conference Executive Committee Vote

We submitted a request to the Seventh-day Adventist Florida Conference Administrative Committee (AdCom), at the request of Elder Cauley, asking them to take our request to the Conference’s Executive Committee.

Our request included several things: (1) to give company status to Simple Church under the Conference Church, with AdCom and specifically Elder Cauley being our

mentor; and (2) to hold membership and take care of our own accounting.

It was also recognized that Simple Church would not fit some of the traditional church operations and procedures, but would be accountable to the Florida Conference President, Elder Cauley, in the development of this pilot project, as is granted in the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*:

Clarification of Meaning

Churches should look to the local conference for advice pertaining to the operating of the church or on questions arising from the Church Manual. If mutual understanding or agreement is not reached, the matter should be referred to the union for clarification.⁷

On May 20, 2008, Simple Church was voted as a company in the Florida Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Membership and treasurer responsibilities were granted.

Getting Started

One principal taught in Growth Groups is “groups are more caught than taught.”⁸ So even though I wanted our church planters in training to experience Simple Church, we were at risk for becoming an Adventist huddle who talked about reaching out but never did (see appendix K).

⁷*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, Revised 2005, 17th Edition, http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/church_manual/index.html (accessed February 26, 2009). This quotation is usually found on page 2 of printed editions.

⁸To better understand the concepts and principles covered in this chapter, it is highly recommended that you complete the online Growth Group training, www.GrowthGroups.us

Simple Church–Not a Practice Session⁹

Some small group models advocate a pilot group that is to serve as a pre-launch. This is deadly to the DNA. My experience has been that a group that starts meeting on a regular weekly basis to “pray and practice” sets in place a group DNA that is very difficult to break out of as they focus on outreach. My prayer was that at least one unchurched person would come on our launching Sabbath. God blessed us with three.

Attendance	25
Family Units	6
Total Adults	17
Total Children ¹⁰	8
1st Time Adult Unchurched ¹¹	3
Returning Adult Unchurched	0
1st Time Adult Churched ¹²	5
Returning Adult Unchurched	0
CORE4 in Training ¹³	9

We were excited. Seventeen percent of our adult attendance were unchurched. We

⁹These statistics are taken from the online weekly reporting form that every Details Coordinator completes for their Simple Church every Sabbath. This information is added to a central Simple Church database from which we can compile information.

¹⁰Simple Church has not recorded whether children are unchurched or churched.

¹¹Simple Church does not measure Adventists verses non-Adventists. Unchurched is defined by a person who has attended church less than one time per month prior to attending Simple Church.

¹²Churched guests do not include Adventists who are becoming CORE4 Simple Church planters. It does include churched Adventists and churched non-Adventists who attend Simple Church. But it has also been our experience that guests of other denominations are typically unchurched.

¹³CORE4 are counted as “CORE4 in training” when they have turned in the Simple Church Annual Commitment Form.

had launched, but were unprepared for the learning curve that was ahead. During those early weeks I imagined that a house church gathering would be eighty percent similar to Growth Groups. With nine months of Simple Church experience, I have adjusted my percentages to about fifty percent Growth Groups and fifty percent unique to Adventist Simple Churches.

The Name “Simple Church”

House churches seem to go by a number of names: House Church, Home Church, Mini Church, Micro Church, Organic Church, and Simple Church.

I chose “Simple Church” because it explained what I wanted to do, namely, simplify the religious rat race that keeps people “busy” doing lots of good things, but keeps one several steps removed from *being and living* the Everlasting Gospel, such that unbelieving neighbors would take note. As I evaluated the amount of time, energy, resources, and finances used just to keep the system going, I asked myself, Is this really good stewardship? Is there a way to free up people’s time so that they have time to “waste” with unchurched people? I have come to believe that the “good” can keep a person from the “best.” See appendix L for a modern day parable called, Satan’s Meeting.

Simple Church articulates three goals: (1) serving our world (Matt 22:37-38), (2) connecting with others (Matt 22:39-40), and (3) connecting with God (Luke 10:25-37).

Serving our world. There is a lot of talk given to serving our world. And there is a lot of service given. Service is a priority. This takes time, which is one of our most precious resources. It is often said that to evaluate one’s priorities, look at their

checkbook and their day-planner. Service is “ministering to their needs,” as Ellen White clarifies (referenced in chapter one). But we have strived to take this service one step further to a no-strings-attached service. This is a service that never says, “I owe you one,” or “You owe me one.” There is no record keeping. It is authentic service. It is a God-honoring service because of who God is and what He is doing through us for His glory.

Connecting with others. George Gallup Jr. says, “[Americans] are among the loneliest people in the world.”¹⁴ Americans are obsessed with being connected, and technology has made it possible to be “connected” with lots of people but still be alone. In light of cell phones and the internet, my wife, Brenda, has often observed, “People can be where they want to be, rather than where they are.”

Connecting with God. Connecting with God is not something we pursue. It is only something to which we can respond. God invented community. He created humanity. When we turn away from Him, He searches for us as He did for Adam and Eve when they first turned away from Him in the Garden of Eden. We want to provide a place where people can both recognize and accept God’s pursuit of them.

Simple Church articulates three ways to help people reach these goals:

(1) simplify life, (2) re-prioritize life, and (3) cultivate a deeper walk with God.

Simplify life. I believe there is a growing sense that the American dream is coming up short. Articles in the *Wall Street Journal*, *Time*, and *Popular Mechanics*, indicate people are looking for a simpler life. Scripture and Ellen White both exemplify

¹⁴George Gallup Jr., *The People’s Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1989), n.p., quoted by Randy Frazee, *The Connecting Church: Beyond Small Groups to Authentic Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 24.

and affirm the spiritual blessing that comes from the effort it takes to live a simpler life. Simple Church encourages people to simplify their life.

Re-prioritize life. While attending high school at Mt. Vernon Academy in Ohio, I would, on occasion, visit a nursing home on Sabbath afternoons. While visiting the residents I would ask them, “If you could live life over, what would you change?” Time and time again, I was told, “Spend your time doing what really counts.” It did not take long to understand this meant spending your time with family and friends, and doing things that really make a difference in peoples’ lives. Simple Church encourages people to re-prioritize their life.

Cultivate a deeper walk with God. Americans, according to a lecture by Allen Hirsch, at the 2008 Exponential National New Church Conference held in Orlando, Florida, are turned off by church, Christianity, and religion.¹⁵ But this does not mean they are not spiritual. In fact, Hirsch says, they are wide open to God. Simple Church has found this to be true. People want to have a deeper relationship with God, but if it means experiencing it in the typical ways, as defined by Christianity, they tend to avoid God and spiritual pursuits altogether. Simple Church encourages people to cultivate a deeper walk with God.

Simple Church is trying to rediscover a primitive Godliness, and the essential basics of “going and making disciples.”

¹⁵For a better understanding of what some of the latest research has discovered, read David Kinnaman, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007).

Training of Trainers

Leadership development is often considered the bottleneck of many voluntary organizations. Simple Church has attempted to actively address this bottleneck. The work of Sanchez has been helpful:

One of the keys to the Church Planting Movement is that leadership training focuses not on “training of leaders” but upon “*training of trainers*.” The leader associated with this movement states that “trained leaders expect to care for their congregation and lead it,” whereas *trainers are expected to start and lead a congregation, AND train those in that congregation to also BE TRAINERS, thus start and lead a group of new believers while training those in turn to do the same*. The word description of that simple change in concept from “leaders” to “trainers” is a bit convoluted, and the outworking of it looks at first glance as “chaotic,” but the end result is often VERY fruitful as those saved realize their part in sharing the gospel of Jesus. The “*training of trainers*” approach is actually a fulfillment of the great commission words of Jesus to “teach them to obey all that I have commanded you.”¹⁶

Some small group models teach a leader and assistant leader relationship. In theory, when someone who is not an assistant leader wants to start a group, they have to complete an equipping track which includes leadership training and doing leadership tasks within the existing group before they are able to lead a group. In the Groups of 12 (G12) small group model, one finds a stronger leadership multiplication, although some would argue that leadership quality is compromised. G12 advocates a leader or co-leaders with everyone else being treated as leaders in training. Growth Groups adopted this G12 principle and discovered that it significantly helps increase the leadership development process with no significant compromises. Simple Church continued in this direction with slight modifications as articulated by Sanchez:

Simple Churches can start at any place where people are responding to the gospel.

¹⁶Sanchez, 125.

Any believer can—and should be—witnessing to friends, family, and colleagues.

Lay people can start and lead a Simple Church as they win friends, family, and colleagues.

People are trained more effectively if they serve during the training rather than completing training before serving.

Training is to train ‘trainers’, not ‘leaders’—hence multiplication.

A Simple Church can meet anywhere, but a rented/purchased meeting place is a significant detriment to multiplication.

Large groups are acceptable, but small, replicating groups, and replicating trainers are better.

A rapid pace of multiplication is not necessarily dangerous.¹⁷

Sanchez summarizes five additional characteristics¹⁸ that Simple Church has found to be true:

Willing Christians. Values and priorities play a significant role in determining willingness. This became painfully obvious as I have been working with churches who are primarily concerned with filling their building, paying their expenses, and desiring to have their “own” pastor. Missionaries have a very high willingness to go.

Training Trainers. Simple Church views everyone who comes into a home as a future trainer of trainers. This means, the CORE4’s responsibility is to train them to eventually leave the current house church, raise up a house church, and teach those people

¹⁷Ibid., 126-129.

¹⁸Ibid., 129-132.

how to train others to go and do likewise. The CORE4 mentality is to think four to five generations down the road.

Simple, Reproducible Training. There is a formal training process which takes a maximum of three months and takes place while experiencing Simple Church from week-to-week, but people must be given the time they need to grow and develop. Simple Church has found that it is the person themselves, in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, who determines the rate of his or her own growth. This approach accommodates those who develop at a faster pace, and allows a “speedy preparation for doing the work that is essential for this time.”¹⁹

Just-In-Time Training. “Training is done while people complete the ‘formal’ online training. It is *Just-In-Time training* in which the trainees learn ‘today’ what they apply . . . ‘tomorrow.’”²⁰

Anyone Can Be Trained. Over the years I have been awed while observing that indeed God still chooses “humble, unlearned men [and women] to proclaim the truths that were to move the world. These men He purposed to train and educate as the leaders of His church. They in turn were to educate others and send them out with the gospel

¹⁹White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, 354.

“Those who really have good abilities such as God will accept to labor in His vineyard, would be very much benefitted by *only a few month’s instruction* at such a school” (italics supplied). Ellen White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students Regarding Christian Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1943), 413.

²⁰Sanchez, 130.

message.”²¹ Sanchez agrees with White when he says,

Given a ready supply of trained and committed religious professionals, it is significant that Jesus did not choose these men for His early followers. In fact, Jesus seemed very intentional in selecting his disciples from among the most common people of his day, fishermen, tax collectors and other ordinary folk. Jesus seemed to feel no compulsion to select the best and the brightest from among the religious elite of his day. Instead, rather than going to the priestly class, he broke with a long legacy of Jewish tradition and chose future leaders from among the *laos*, those who were untrained, non-professionals in the religious matters of his day.²²

Obedience and Accountability. Simple Church CORE4 people make a commitment to attend in person, or via Skype, the monthly CORE4 meetings.

Spiritual Growth of the Trainers. Accountability for spiritual growth is also built into monthly CORE4 meetings. It is a biblical principle that those who are active in sharing their faith will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ, (Phil 1:6). This “active in sharing their faith” is also built into the annual commitment card that CORE4 personnel sign every year (this is described later).

Simple Church has endeavored to train trainers to be trainers of trainers.

Annual Shared Ministry Vision

For Adventists to stay involved in Simple Church and/or transfer their membership into Simple Church, they need to share our Ministry Vision. For expanded information on this process see appendix M.

²¹White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 17.

²²Sanchez, 475.

Biblical Qualification for CORE4 Church Planters

Simple Church uses the biblical qualification for Elders as described by 1 Tim 3:1-7 and Titus 1:7-9.

CORE4 Responsibilities and Job Description²³

CORE4 planters need to display character qualities as outlined in 1 Tim 3:2-12 and Titus 1:5-9. CORE4 are appointed in Simple Church as seen in Titus 1:5. In the case where a woman does not want to be listed as an Elder on the Conference records, Simple Church honors her request.

Simple Church places a great emphasis on being appointed with a commissioning service, which includes the laying on of hands, as CORE4 workers are ordained to do the work that God has called them to do. Appendix N expands on this job description.

The “Formal” Training

Formal training is divided into two sections: (1) Online Training, and (2) Just-In-Time Training.

Online Training has two phases. Phase one consists of the Growth Groups training, which is followed by a comprehensive reading of the Simple Church web page, including all PDF, audio, and movie links. Phase two begins with the Shared Ministry Vision which lead one into Phase Two.

Just-In-Time Training begins with a live visit to a Simple Church. If needed, this involves a weekend trip for those who are not “local.” Once Simple Church has been

²³Taken from the Simple Church Network Guidelines.

experienced, “caught,” then the next two months of Simple Church are experienced via Skype.com where they learn how to use tools like: Matthew Parties, Open Chair, Open Chair Worksheets, Group Agreements, Blessing Lists, Connection Card Envelopes, Invitation Post Cards, Child Safety Poster, etc. During this time trainees participate in monthly CORE4 meetings where accountability for online training progress is monitored along with other items, depending on their CORE4 role.

Some of these items include: online background checks, opening a petty cash checking account, an understanding of how to complete the weekly online reporting form, which feeds information into a central database.

Experiencing God Workbook

Once online training is completed, CORE4 leaders are given the workbook, *Experiencing God*, by Henry Blackaby. This is the single most helpful resource I have discovered which helps people, especially the cognitive Adventists, learn how to see where God is working, and then join Him in His work. Blackaby teaches that if God showed you where He is working, then He is personally inviting you to join Him in a very tangible and hands-on way.²⁴ This workbook also helps establish a habit of daily quiet

²⁴John 5:17, 19, “My father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too am working. . . . I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and tells him everything he is doing.”

“So utterly was Christ emptied of self that He made no plans for Himself. He accepted God’s plans for Him, and day by day the Father unfolded His plans. So should we depend upon God, that our lives may be the simple outworking of His will.” “So long as we surrender the will to God, and trust in His strength and wisdom, we shall be guided in safe paths, to fulfill our appointed part in His great plan. But the one who depends upon

time with Jesus that many Adventists do not experience.

Multiplying New Simple Churches

Each new launch is given a one-time lump sum of \$500 petty cash in their checking account, plus the first \$500 that is collected from personal offerings, for a launch petty cash balance totaling \$1000.00.

One principle identified by IMB regarding church planting movements is that it is imperative NOT to set up a mission endeavor in such a way as to require continuous outside funding in order to keep it going. This cripples the mission and does not allow it to become indigenous. Extractionistic approaches to missions *almost invariably create national churches and institutions dependent on the outside for support and guidance*. Typical of Western-sponsored mission enterprises in the Third World is the mission compound. Mission compounds are initiated when missionaries select an area and enclose it for privacy. They build Western houses for their accommodations and construct hospitals and schools to serve the community. Typically the missionaries' houses are separated from the rest of the mission station by a hedge or a fence. Almost all contact with nationals occurs within the mission compound. The missionaries train leaders by bringing nationals to the compound for formal schooling and attempt to evangelize by sending compound-trained leaders back to their villages. Naturally, leadership training is limited to those who are able to speak the missionary's language and understand their cultural framework. The cost of maintaining the compound makes it very difficult to turn the mission enterprise over to the national church without continued financial subsidy. The mission compound is an area where the foreigner can feel at home in the midst of a foreign culture.²⁵

All tithes and offerings go through the Conference Details Coordinator who functions as both Simple Church's treasurer and clerk. Local Simple Church Details Coordinators work as assistants to the Conference Details Coordinator.

All tithe is remitted to the conference. Local petty cash checking accounts are

his own wisdom and power is separating himself from God. Instead of working in unison with Christ, he is fulfilling the purpose of the enemy of God and man." White, *Desire of the Ages*, 208.

²⁵Van Rheen, 62-63 (italics supplied).

replenished from actual offerings contributed to a given location when the Details Coordinator sends original receipts to the Conference Details Coordinator. Each location has a line item on the financial reports showing their balance on hand from which their petty cash is replenished.

Of course, only money that goes through the Conference Details Coordinator qualifies for tax deductions. The petty cash system also provides some protection against embezzlement. At any time the Conference Details Coordinator can request monthly copies of a Simple Church's petty cash checking account statements. Appendix O articulates a philosophy of how Simple Church uses money.

Simple Church Network Participation

Although many house church networks require a portion, ranging from ten to fifty percent of all monetary donations, to be given to fund the house church network,²⁶ the Simple Church network has avoided adding this expense to local Simple Churches, considering that all tithe, which amounts to approximately two-thirds of donations, goes

²⁶Kreider and McClung, 108, 150. In the following paragraph it would have been helpful if Payne expounded on the house churches who pay by explaining, of the total house churches included, how many were part of a network, and of those, how many were paying and non-paying. He only tells us that six were paying something to a network. It would also have been insightful as to which ones were part of a denominational network.

In our study, only a couple network leaders actually received regular financial support from the churches. Both of these men had connections with denominations and had no secular form of employment. At least six of the participants in our study stated that their churches regularly gave financial support to their individual house church pastors. The majority of the network leaders and individual house church pastors (which sometimes included the same leaders overseeing the network) did not receive regular financial support from the churches. Payne, 99.

on to the conference. Simple Church wants to see 100 percent of their offerings going to non-asset and non-inventory items, meaning, we want to use our offerings to invest and help in the real needs of people when ever God shows the need.

Simple Church has avoided paying the CORE4 church planting teams: (1) not only does it go against church planting movement principles, it is counter to our Adventists roots to pay “settled” leaders, as articulated by Russell Burrill in his dissertation;²⁷ (2) in light of the financial trends in Adventists finances, lay-led is advantaged for the continuation of Kingdom growth; and (3) as articulated in chapter one, I believe the practice of settled/professional pastors is partly responsible for declining church conditions we see in North American churches.

Sabbath Gathering Flow

People often ask what we “do,” as if there is an undiscovered magical formula that we have somehow discovered. This is not the case. There is nothing magical about what we do. It is the interplay of a theological, philosophical, and missiological foundation that shapes the expression of Adventists house churches. But to answer the question at hand, What do you do on Sabbath? I will systematically walk through one functioning location that will serve as an example. One word of caution–It can be tempting to think, “All I have to do is copy this example and all will go well.” This is not about a formula. It is the art of working in conjunction with the Holy Spirit and being an extension of God’s

²⁷Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach*, 158.

mission as described in chapter two. An expanded description of the Sabbath flow is outlined in appendix P.

10:00 - 10:45 a.m	Breakfast is shared
10:45 - 11:30 a.m.	Singing and Check-In
11:30 - 1:00 p.m.	Children go to Adventures
	Adults share a relational Bible study
1:30 - 2:30 p.m.	Lunch is shared
2:30 p.m. and on varies	

What To Do with Children

Truth 4 Youth,²⁸ on their web page runs a tag line that reads, “Reaching the ‘5-13’ Window for Christ!” Sometimes adults are tempted to view children as a necessary inconvenience to the “real” group. To validate Truth 4 Youth’s claims, they add the following information on their web page.

The verdict is in: By far the most effective “window” of time for reaching others with the gospel is between the ages of 5 and 13. In fact, research by the Barna Institute shows that children between the ages of 5 and 13 are more than five times more likely than adults to make a lifelong commitment to Christ.²⁹

Simple Church holds children and their spiritual development among our top priorities. Appendix Q contains additional information regarding Children.

²⁸Truth 4 Youth, <http://www.youngdisciple.com/Truth4Youth> (accessed February 19, 2009).

²⁹Ibid.

Longing for Belonging

It does not matter if one is eight, thirty-eight, or eighty-eight years old. Everyone wants to belong.

Belonging is a two-way street. Typically, in the church world “we” determine when a person belongs. But this has changed in our culture.

It used to be that people asked, “What do you (1) believe?” Then when they had learned *and* changed their (2) behavior to “the standard,” we would declare them ready for (3) baptism which equaled (4) belonging. Adventist affirm this in their choice of language when they describe a person as being non-Adventist; after they are baptized, they are referred to as “Adventist.”

Times have changed. People are looking for a place to (1) belong. When they find a place to belong, they “hang-out” and a Kingdom principle begins to do its work, “By beholding we become changed.” It is unavoidable. People’s (2) behavior begins to change. Eventually curiosity kicks in and people ask, “Why do you . . . ?” at which time we are invited to share what we (3) believe. (Does this remind you of mingling, sympathizing, ministering to needs, winning confidence, and bidding?) Eventually some people decide to be (4) baptized.

Past: Believe > Behave > Baptism = Belonging

Present: Belong > Behave > Believe > Baptism

Notice the difference. In the past Baptism = Belonging. Today, Belonging is on the front end, and Baptism is on the back end.

Joseph Myers says, “There are many who consider themselves part of the

community of faith until they are confronted by someone who tells them otherwise. Our culture wonders, with some confusion, ‘Why don’t I belong?’”³⁰

Previously, the church has decided when a person belongs. Now “the person” decides when he or she belongs. Again, Myers captures this difference.

There are those who belong to our congregations who have not asked permission to do so. They connect with the congregation and they choose to belong. Sometimes they decide to follow the rules of engagement; at other times they create their own. Yet make no mistake; their experience of belonging is significant in their lives.³¹

The belonging, however, does not have to be mutual. It is more about how it feels to the person and less about how the organization views him.³²

This is precisely why the annual Blessing List³³ is of such importance. When a person comes the second time to Simple Church, their first name is added to the blessing list. Simple Church wants to send the message, “you belong.” The person may or may not have yet decided, but the very fact that he came back a second time tells us there was a connecting that took place.

This is also why an annual Group Agreement, which includes a hand-written directory, is developed. It is a “next step” for people to say, “I belong.” With the Blessing List we said, “you belong.” Now, the person is saying, “I belong.” In time, and after much mingling, ministering, sympathizing, and winning of confidence, God will open the door

³⁰Joseph R. Myers, *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community and Small Groups* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 25.

³¹Ibid., 29.

³²Ibid., 42.

³³The Growth Group training further explains the Blessing List and Group Agreement.

for us to bid them to take another step towards Jesus.

Overcoming Obstacles

Obstacles are both real and perceived. First, we will address the real obstacles Simple Church has faced, and then move to the perceived obstacles which at any time could become real.

Real Obstacles

Consumer Christianity is an obstacle. Simple Church intentionally and continually re-focuses beyond what “I want, and I like, and I, I, I.”

Payne observes,

A major issue facing future North American house churches is that many of them will be no different (missionally-speaking) than the majority of the traditional churches on this continent. As nonmissional church members leave traditional churches, they will plant or become part of house churches that are evangelistically anemic. The future membership in North America’s house churches will generally fall into the following four categories: hurting Christians, new-experience Christians, anti-establishment Christians, and new believers.³⁴

Simple Church resonates with Payne and others who are discovering this. Payne continues.

It was ironic to hear from these church leaders that one of the major struggles was leading the churches to be outwardly focused. Please remember, these churches were selected for study because they were reaching others with the gospel. The truth learned from these church leaders is that evangelism is challenging work. Even missional churches are quick to become inwardly focused.³⁵

While there is no guaranteed way to guard against this, there are several steps that

³⁴Payne, 123.

³⁵Ibid., 127.

were developed in Growth Groups and have been used and expanded in Simple Church: Open Chair, Open Chair Worksheet, Prayer walking, CORE4 church planting Annual Commitment Card, Group Agreement, Personal Invitation Cards, monthly CORE4 meetings, keeping the religious rat race simple so that people have time to hang out with unchurched people, Public Harvest Events, and what we call the Simple Church Welcome. This is not a magical formula. One of these, or even all of these, does not guarantee missional success. Although the interplay of all helps shape a missional focus, it is only when people work in cooperation with the Holy Spirit that we can share the joy of seeing people embrace the Everlasting Gospel.

Of those items listed, some have already been addressed in chapter three and in this chapter. Others are thoroughly explained in the free online Growth Group training. This author will give attention to those which are not included in the Growth Group training, and which are deemed significant in maintaining a missional edge.

The annual Shared Ministry Vision rises to the top as it encompasses a broad scope in setting missional DNA. People quickly realize that Simple Church is living the missionary life here in North America. Simple Church is high on active measurable commitment and low on “membership,” although believers are baptized in the Simple Church Seventh-day Adventist Church. Each year all CORE4 church planters, and everyone who holds membership in the Simple Church Network, are asked to recommit.

Simple Church unapologetically realizes that we have intentionally lowered the bar on what it means to “do church” and focused on what it means to “be church.”³⁶

³⁶Sanchez, 29.

Invitation Cards

Who is my Neighbor? Our neighbor is the one God brings to our attention. It is showing mercy in a variety of ways: time, encouragement, financial, helping-hand, etc. These are the people with whom we are to mingle, sympathize, minister to their needs, win their confidence, and bid them to a next step. Payne poignantly reminds us that “the best opportunities for evangelism lie with people who form part of their everyday contacts.”³⁷ Many times it is the people closest to us with whom God invites us to build a relationship.

There are other key opportunities for building relationships.

At points of anxiety or crisis in life it is to one’s conceptual system that one turns for the encouragement to continue or the stimulus to take other action. Crisis times such as death, birth, and illness; transition times such as puberty, marriage, planting and harvest; times of uncertainty; times of elation—all tend to heighten anxiety or in some other way require adjustment between behavior and belief.³⁸

It has been Simple Church’s experience that these life events form the catalyst from which spiritual receptivity to the Holy Spirit takes place. It has also been our experience that once spiritual steps are taken, Satan attacks, and relationships are what help pull people through difficult times. Maybe this is why Ellen White says that “true success” begins with mingling. It is about authentic relationships with people.

³⁷Payne, 80.

³⁸Kraft, 45.

CORE4 Church Planting Teams

Some suggest a larger house church planting team.³⁹ But it would be a disservice to send a team that would “fill up” the house. In North American church culture a “full house” means we are done with our work and can sit back and wait for Jesus to come. When a group begins with four people, plus a few others, it becomes painfully obvious that it is up to them to raise up a house church. There is nobody else around who they can blame if it does not happen. If they do not re-prioritize their life to begin seeing what “neighbors” God brings their way; if they do not mingle, build confidence, and invite them, then it is not going to happen.

This has, in this author’s humble opinion, been the best motivator for getting Adventists free from the trap of paying the pastor and a professional Bible worker to do our work for us—feed us and fill up our church.

Spending Time with Unchurched People

Simply stated, if a church planter does not simplify and re-prioritize his life, such that he has strategic time to “waste,” meaning—hanging out with, rubbing shoulders with, and connecting with people, there will be a limited number of people, if any, to bid.

Stages of Group Life

Other real obstacles Simple Church has had to work through are the stages of

³⁹Viola suggests eight adults, who are devoted to developing a common life in Christ, constitutes a critical mass for a long-standing house church to begin. Frank Viola, *Gathering in Homes* (Gainesville, FL: Present Testimony Ministry, 2006), 8, <http://www.ptmin.org/gathering.htm> (accessed February 19, 2009).

group life. Families go through stages of life. Compared to a traditional family sense, it begins with a “honeymoon time.” This is followed by “the honeymoon is over” time, often called a “storming time” when one learns what bugs the other person. A “performing time” usually consists of raising children, paying bills, and the humdrum of life which is followed by a “reforming time” when the children are gone and the parents are rediscovering who they are and what will be their focus. Groups follow a similar pattern, although one recognizes that there can be overlap, and elements form all four stages occurring at the same time.

The longer a Simple Church has been in existence, the more elements from all four areas will exist simultaneously.

Upon reflection, it has been interesting that most of the “difficult people” have been those who are longtime Christians, no matter what their denominational background. Unchurched people have been pleasant, peaceful, and eager to grow.

Perceived Obstacles

Perceived obstacles have outnumbered real obstacles: doctrinal purity, a sense of connecting to a world-wide Adventist church, tithe, CORE4 losing their “training of trainers” vision, and regressing into what has been modeled for the majority of them, namely, settled pastors.

Denominational leaders and evangelists have asked how Simple Church would maintain a doctrinal purity. Before answering this important question, I first must establish that our current system has not eliminated this problem, to which they readily agree. Simple Church addresses this question in several ways:

The CORE4 training process requires one to choose and complete an Adventist Bible study series.

The Annual Commitment Card calls for several commitments: (1) agreement with the core teachings of Adventism, (2) facilitate one mid-week one-on-one Bible study using an Adventist Bible study series, (3) quarterly Fusion gatherings, (4) yearly Simple Church harvest events, and (5) a stated tithe and offering commitment.

Granted, being in the early stages of development, even though Simple Church has not yet conducted any harvest events, one is hard-pressed to find another Adventist church where its members and attenders participate at this level of active outreach. This has not only maintained doctrinal purity, it has pushed members to rediscover what they believe and why they believe what they believe.

Garrison confirms this in his study of church planting movements.

Critics contend that a grassroots phenomenon such as a Church Planting Movement is fertile ground for heresy. This may be true, but is not necessarily so. The often-proposed solution is more theological training. However, church history has shown that the cure can be worse than the disease. Since the first theological school at Alexandria, Egypt, seminaries have proven themselves capable of transmitting heresy as well as sound doctrine. The same is true today.⁴⁰

Burrill confirms this observation which should give us a clue into a solution to the problem. “The great heresies in the early Church arose not from the rapid expansion resulting from the work of these unknown teachers; but in those churches which were *longest established*, and where the Christians were not so *busily engaged in converting the heathen around them*”⁴¹ (italics supplied).

⁴⁰Garrison, 47.

⁴¹Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach*, 42.

Simple Church advocates a significantly stronger mission focus than it practices among the membership of most Adventist churches.

Connectedness to something bigger than the local house church and to the world church is accomplished in several ways. Simple Church attends local conference sponsored campmeetings. Quarterly Fusion gatherings are “mini-campmeetings” which tend to structure as a spiritual retreat weekend. All members receive the *Adventist Review*, Union, and local Conference papers.

Tithe questions are the easiest. Tithe functions identical to any Adventist church. It is sent on to the conference.

The last perceived obstacle is yet to be determined. Adventism, for the past 100 years has operated against the council of Ellen White by settling pastors over local churches. This is all Simple Church CORE4 leadership has ever seen. But they must see a vision that encompasses five to six generations down the road. CORE4 must be training the trainers. If they regress in what they have always seen, Simple Church will take on the problems that the majority of churches in North America are now facing. Frank Viola recognizes this potential problem. “If the ‘initiators’ [what we call CORE4] do not take the second step and invite an apostolic worker in to lay the foundation and equip the new church to function under Christ, then those ‘initiators’ will become the pastors of the group by default. Whether this happens wittingly or unwittingly, it will occur.”⁴² One needs to recognize that Viola is coming from a point of view where house churches start

⁴²Frank Viola, *Finding Organic Church*, page 11, <http://www.ptmin.org/findingchurch.pdf> (accessed February 19, 2009).

on their own and are not connected to anyone unless they choose to be. It could be that Simple Church has partially addressed this by its network structure within the Adventist Church.

To proactively keep this focus, Simple Church monitors a number of items on its weekly online report: (1) the usage of Open Chair, Matthew Parties, (2) questions like, How many people are you actively training to become church planters? and How many church plants did you start this week? and (3) monthly CORE4 accountability meetings.

Only time will tell if Simple Church is able to break free of the settled pastor constraints.

Summary

In this chapter we have focused on what it took to launch Simple Church. A dream is born, the pre-launch, actually starting the first Simple Church, a general Sabbath flow, and obstacles faced were over-arching topics of discussion.

The house church model may well be the evangelistic church planting wave of the future. A bottom-up, low-cost approach to church growth that values the role of “humble and unlearned people”⁴³ rather than the existing top-down, high-cost approach that is largely building-centered and pastor-driven.⁴⁴

⁴³White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 17.

⁴⁴Banks and Banks, 141.

CHAPTER 5

PROJECT EVALUATION AND REFLECTION

This chapter will address three areas: (1) Natural Church Development (NCD) survey scores, (2) a subjective and reflective evaluation, and (3) modifications made during the project.

The NCD survey tool was chosen to evaluate this project's health because of its long standing reputation and wide acceptance as a reliable evaluation tool, and because the North American Division continues to both use and recommend its use to Adventist churches.

A subjective and reflective evaluation will examine the project's development and outcome. Significant modifications made during the project will also be articulated.

Natural Church Development

Natural Church Development survey sheets were given to CORE4 leadership in all the existing Simple Church Florida locations: Sorrento, North Tampa, and East Orlando. Survey sheets were also given to all who were unchurched and became baptized, as well as to the unchurched who are actively involved and "belong" to Simple Church but have not yet been baptized. Adventists who were in training to launch their own Simple Church were also given survey sheets.

NCD Score for Simple Church

Simple Church Network Natural Church Development Scores¹ compared to Seventh-day Adventist Church averages.²

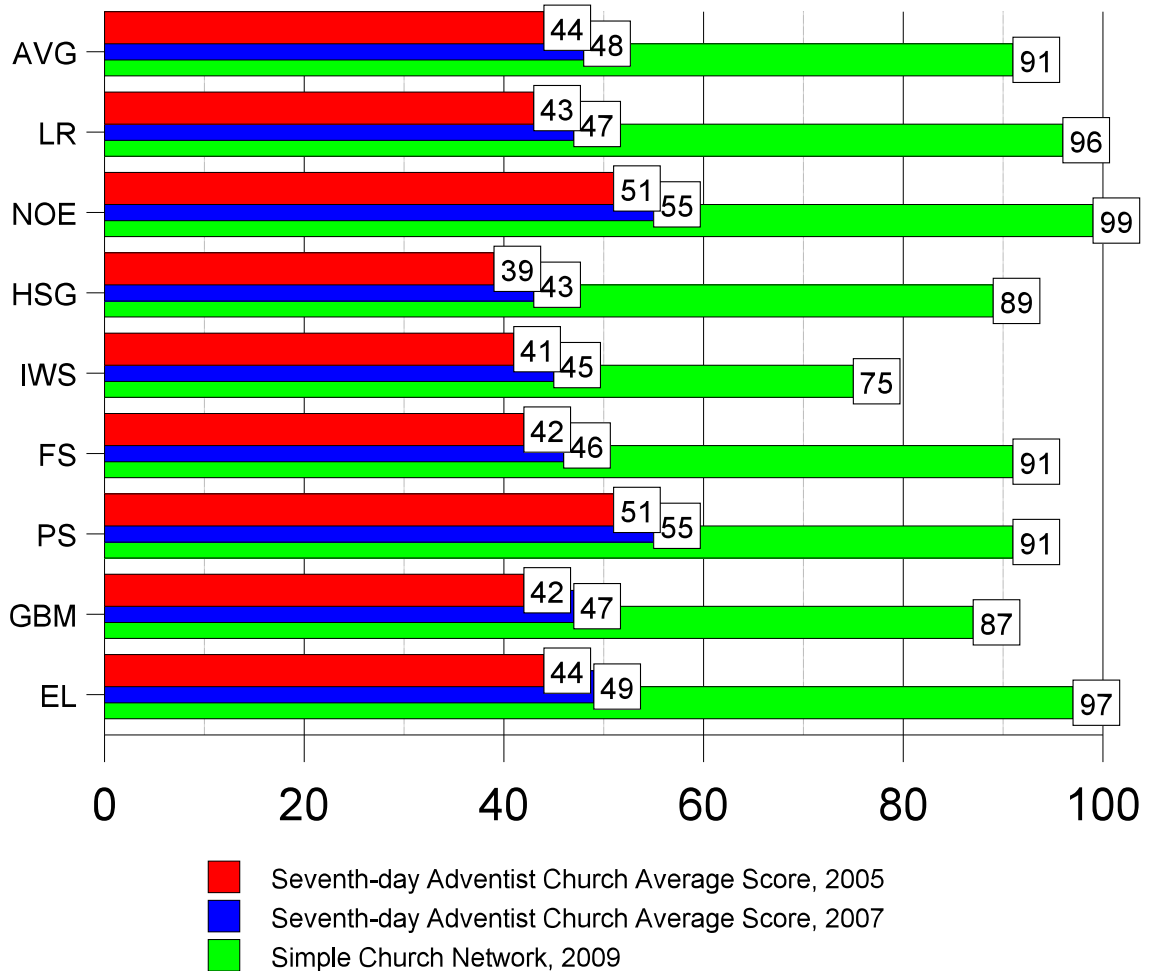


Figure 1. NCD and Simple Church comparison.

¹X-Axis abbreviations are as follows: NCD Averages; Loving Relationship; Need-Oriented Evangelism; Holistic Small Groups; Inspiring Worship; Functional Structure; Passionate Spirituality; Gift-Oriented Ministry; Empowering Leadership.

²The 2005 and 2007 reports can be downloaded from www.GrowthGroups.us Look for a link to NCD (accessed April 15, 2009).

NCD Score Observations

Having used this evaluation tool a number of times while pastoring typical Adventist churches, a number of observations surfaced as this tool was used in a house church paradigm.

My wife and I, after taking our surveys and prior to receiving our NCD results, observed: (1) questions relating to Gift-Based Ministry seems to measure one's ability to cognitively be able to identify and articulate one's spiritual giftedness. Subsequently, a few of these questions were left blank. Simple Church has not placed much emphasis on this intellectual approach to giftedness. Gift-based ministry is discovered experientially over time; (2) questions relating to Inspiring Worship Service seemed to reflect a consumer approach to church. It was also noted, prior to turning in the surveys, that numerous participants left questions relating to the worship service and questions that included the word "sermon" blank. Questions like, question ten, "I feel the sermon in the worship service speaks to my personal situation" are irrelevant in the context of Simple Church. Question twenty-five, "I enjoy listening to the sermons in the worship service" does not apply. There are no sermons. Worship is participatory as compared with a "feed me" approach to church. It is questions like these that reveal a subtle assumption that the worship service is about me and for me and if I do not like it I just might go somewhere else.

Given the confusion over Gift-Based Ministry and Inspiring Worship Service questions that were left blank, I anticipated lower scores. But I was quite surprised at how high the total NCD score was.

Subjective and Reflective Evaluation

This project was born after a background of twenty-two years of learning about and working with Growth Groups. We credit its official birth as being the day my wife and I decided to plant an Adventist house church in our own home in Sorrento, Florida (June 2008). Our goal was to promote Kingdom growth by using natural relational networks in reaching unchurched people. It is important to note that this project was not part of my line of work, nor my wife's. No one was paid to plant a house church. It was a voluntary initiative started in cooperation with the Florida Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. I recognize that my past experience (as a pastor for sixteen years) contributed both positively and negatively to this project, as would anybody's life experience contribute in starting a house church.

Reflection and Observations

With an effort to be honest and forthright, we present these observations. Some of the experiences were very positive; some were most difficult. They are grouped into five areas.

CORE4 Items

There are several observations as they relate specifically to CORE4 issues.

Responsibility shift

With no clergy to depend upon or salary to "do the work," Adventist church planters carried all the privileges and responsibilities as they learned how to *become* the church. This was a learning process. But CORE4 quickly realized that when God brought

them an invitation to join Him in His work, there was no pastor, elder, deacon, etc. to call upon and assume they would “take care of it.” If the CORE4 did not do the work, it would not get done. One person expressed it this way, “I’m amazed at how much I depended upon a pastor to do. Now, if I don’t step up to the plate, the opportunity will be missed.” This is what it mean to *be* the church.

Unchurching the churched

It took some time, given our CORE4’s churched background, to understand the implications of what it meant to be front-line missionaries. Typically one thinks of a missionary as one who flies to another country, dresses differently, eats different food, learns a new language, and learns a new culture. It took awhile for some CORE4 to realize that this is what we were doing right here in North America as we were trying to reach unchurched people.

But, surprisingly, we found ourselves learning a new culture. To communicate, we had to “unchurch” ourselves. These changes were not the goal in and of themselves. They were part of this unchurching process. Slowly Adventist talk disappeared. This was motivated by the fact that from the first Sabbath unchurched people were present. Dress became more informal. And typical conversations like, “How are you doing?” “Fine.” felt out of place and people began to have deeper conversations.

Experiencing God

Given our Adventist intellectual approach to church and spiritual growth, I was trying to find a “missing link” to give practical hands and feet to everyday Christianity.

The workbook, *Experiencing God*, by Henry Blackaby helped address this problem. The thesis of the workbook is based on four elements found in John 5:17, 19, “(1) My father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too am working. . . . I tell you the truth; (2) the Son can do nothing by himself; (3) he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does; (4) for the Father loves the Son and tells him everything he is doing.” Simply stated, when you see a need, that is God’s personal invitation to you to join Him in His work. Ellen White sheds some supportive thoughts when she says,

So utterly was Christ emptied of self that He made no plans for Himself. He accepted God's plans for Him, and day by day the Father unfolded His plans. So should we depend upon God, that our lives may be the simple outworking of His will. So long as we surrender the will to God, and trust in His strength and wisdom, we shall be guided in safe paths, to fulfill our appointed part in His great plan. But the one who depends upon his own wisdom and power is separating himself from God. Instead of working in unison with Christ, he is fulfilling the purpose of the enemy of God and man.³

Although Blackaby does not include White’s comments, the workbook takes a student through the process of learning how to recognize God’s leading in the everyday walk of life. This workbook has been an optional part of leadership training, but with new church plants it has become a required part of the training process. There has been a noticeable difference between CORE4 who have recently completed this workbook and those who have not completed it.

Simple church does not mean easy church

Like I have taught in Growth Groups for years, working with people is some of

³White, *Desire of the Ages*, 208.

the hardest and most rewarding Kingdom work a person will ever do. This means that CORE4 leadership has had to learn how to pace themselves for the long haul. One Host Coordinator mentioned to my wife, after they had launched a house church in their home one month earlier, “This is hard work, and here I used to come to your home on Sabbath morning and think this was easy.” Although we try to better prepare leaders in training, there is no way for them to fully understand the labor it involves until one raises up their own Simple Church. Simple Church is simply hard work.

Spiritual warfare

Over time we began to notice that when an Adventist started the training process, they either lost their job, lost hours of work, or had difficulty getting enough work. So far, this has impacted five of the seven church planting families.

Baptism is the beginning

It is sometimes said that baptism is not an arrival point, but it is the beginning. CORE4 have discovered a new dimension to this concept. As unchurched people have come to call Simple Church their church, even after some have been baptized, there is a long road of discipleship that still needs to be developed. And since relational intimacy tends to be more real and authentic in smaller groups, challenges cannot be ignored in hopes “the pastor” will take care of them. The discipling process includes preparation for baptism, followed by spiritual mentoring.

Personal Family Items

There are several observations as they relate specifically to personal family issues.

Our house is everybody's house

Our home is a 1,500 to 1,600 square foot, three-bedroom, two-bath house. It is a common ordinary home. When one opens their home week after week, people become very comfortable there, especially the children. We have simplified our home, made it childproof, and only have one bedroom that is off-limits (that is our children's bedroom). And even this room is used for parents to put their babies down for naps. The master bedroom is used for children's activities, which means we flip our bed up against the wall to make enough room. A second bedroom is also used for children's activities. People know what is in all of our kitchen cupboards. They go into the garage where we have a second fridge available to put food they have brought for lunch. Items get broken, and there are some stains on the carpet. Welcome to the mission field.

Simple church has protected our children

Sabbath is the highlight of our children's week. It is a full day of talking together, singing together, eating together, playing together, and worshiping together. Our children have "caught" what it means to live a life 24/7 as missionaries who arrange their lives to reach people with the Everlasting Gospel

Loss of my job

Even though Simple Church was under the Florida Conference, ASI leadership did not approve of having Simple Church associated with one of their employees. So,

they dismissed me from my position with LIFE. But God is good and has turned this very difficult experience into a blessing for His glory. Now I am better prepared to minister to those who have lost, or will lose, their job.

Difficult Items

There are several observations as they relate specifically to difficult issues.

Eyes off Christ

Long-time Christians, both Adventists and non-Adventists, have provided some of our most difficult moments. We have observed that when one's identity is based on how "conservative" one's theology is, or when one's identity is based on how much Bible quoting one can do, we become problem-oriented sooner or later. In one case, our Adventist guests tried to use Simple Church as a forum to distribute homemade CDs of which we knew not the content. Fortunately, when I asked them to put their material away and explained why it was not appropriate, they were cooperative. In another instance, long-time Christians of another denomination attempted to gain influence and leadership by showing how much Bible quoting they could do. That is when we limited our discussion to the Bible story at hand, as is taught in the Growth Group's training seminar.

Searching for power

Simple Church operates out of a simple structure. Many of the "positions of power" that exist in a typical church are non-existent (i.e., church board, business meetings). This was frustrating at first for some of our CORE4. Eventually I had to explain that Simple Church offered them the ability to roll up their shirt sleeves and raise

up a church. If they were looking for, or hoping for, something else from Simple Church, they would be disappointed and were free to go back to their church. Simple Church provides front-line, missionary-minded, lay people an opportunity to connect with God, connect with others, and serve our hurting world as Jesus did. It is nothing more, nothing less.

Hoping for “real” church

There have been a few Adventists who have had a hard time with the biblical teaching that defines the church as the people. Coming from years of public building + pastor + programs = “real” church has been a hard adjustment. In one instance, one family who started the training process decided to go back to their large church. We sent them with blessings.

One Other Issue

There have been some who are very bothered by Simple Church’s front-line missionary focus. They have creatively tried to find ways of getting involved with Simple Church without being a front-line missionary in North America. In general, it has come down to two items: facilitating one mid-week one-on-one Bible study, and realizing that Simple Church commitment means they are not able to church-hop.

Regarding the Bible study, people often say that giving a Bible study is not their gift. They are shy, have had a bad experience, are not a good teacher, etc. We explain to them that this is not a problem, because there are people “out there” who do not want anyone coming to their door, and would prefer to have Bible studies via the postal

service. This provides another way for them to be a front-line missionary, which is what Simple Church is about. Some Adventists are delighted to be able to serve in this capacity, others choose not to get involved in Simple Church.

Regarding church-hopping, there is no way to be able to serve in Simple Church and continue to church hop. Missionary work takes a significant, non-consumer commitment. Weddings, funerals, vacations, etc., are a normal part of life. That is why there is a CORE4. When one or two of the four leaders must be gone, there are others to continue.

Significant Modifications Made During the Project

With twenty-two years of Growth Groups experience, most of the group dynamic issues had been refined as they related to Adventism. This meant that new modifications typically related to how Simple Church fits under the existing denominational structure. Doing missionary work in North America, we find, has no existing paradigm; it involves sailing in uncharted waters. Simple Church has invented an infrastructure from which to work within the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The two ongoing modifications that we are still discovering are (1) how to “become the church” as compared with “going to church” and (2) how to let God be the leader on Sabbath instead of following a predetermined program. This is not to say there is no program. It is a question of, Who is the ultimate orchestrator—the CORE4 or Jesus Christ?

Summary

This chapter (1) reported NCD scores; (2) reflected on the scores, the strengths, and weaknesses of using this tool to evaluate house churches, as well as a general subjective evaluation; and (3) highlighted modifications made through the project.

In light of these observations, chapter six will address strengths and weaknesses of a house church model and then draw a conclusion with recommendations.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

God lives in community, and out of that community He created a subcommunity that could reproduce itself—the human race. Sin entered this sub community, resulting in broken relationships, and so God moved to “plan B” to restore and redeem His broken community by sending Jesus to the human race. Jesus, then, invented “the church,” which was/is to be the extension of His work to seek and save a lost world. To this church Jesus sent the Holy Spirit who would empower all who would accept His invitation to join Him in seeking and saving a lost world. Joining this missionary work is the goal of Simple Church.

Simple Church has attempted to develop a simple, grass-roots organizational structure that makes it possible for the majority of Simple Church resources (missionaries, time, and money) to be used on the frontier edge of missionary work, faithfully reaching unchurched people with the Everlasting Gospel of Jesus Christ.

What has been discovered the this project and with regards to the presenting problem, namely, church attendance is steadily declining throughout North America. Nevertheless, people are still seeking God, but it is occurring outside the church walls? People are indeed seeking God outside the walls of conventional church buildings.

Data Summary Analysis

In the abstract of this dissertation, this author stated, “Church attendance is steadily declining throughout North America. Nevertheless, people are still seeking God, but it is occurring outside the church walls. In response to this trend, this project was started. The purpose was to establish an Adventist house church within the Florida Conference of Seventh-day Adventists to assess whether or not a house church had front-line missionary viability.”

This author’s conclusion is that Simple Church has effectively provided a place outside church walls for active discipleship and spiritual growth, and has evidenced itself as a viable front-line missionary initiative. These conclusions are based on the data summary analysis listed below.

Appendix T summarizes data collected throughout this project, beginning June 1, 2008, and concluding March 31, 2009. Note the following observations:

1. Average attendance for the first (mother) Simple Church was twenty-four people. This number is on the high side, as it includes several adults who were in training to launch new locations. After the mother location multiplied, making a total of three locations in the eighth and ninth months, average attendance on Sabbath in the tenth month was twenty per location, with a network total of sixty in attendance. It is expected that the location average of twenty will decline as new groups start up, because each new location begins with four adults, and therefore initially brings the average attendance down (until these new locations have time to grow).

2. Total average adult attendance is nine, while average child attendance is ten.

Younger families with children are responding to Simple Church. This is encouraging because discipling family units is one of Simple Church's goals.

3. Although there is an ethnic mix of people involved in Simple Church, a non-recorded observation is that Simple Church is reaching American-born Caucasians. In some cases the fathers were not willing to attend a public church building, but were actively participating in Simple Church while leading their children in Bible studies as they themselves were going through Bible studies.

4. Appendix T records a network average of 29.77% of adult guests who were unchurched. Simple Church takes this percentage as a compliment in that it is truly reaching unchurched people. In contrast, 21.41% of adult guests are churched people with a lower number of returning churched people. This "churched" count does not include Adventists who are in training to launch a new Simple Church location.

5. There were six baptisms in the last half of 2008, with zero baptisms during the first quarter of 2009. This 2009 count of zero baptisms could partially be due to the fact that the mother location has spent its time giving birth to two new locations. It is anticipated that the mother location will go through a time of recovery before it again refocuses. On the other hand, these new locations are just getting started. At best, they have been in existence for one or two months. It is premature to assess long-term baptismal growth, except to remember Payne's monumental research noted in chapter four under "House Church and House Church Network Characteristics."

6. Although Florida Conference has been very supportive, they have not had to use any tithe money to support a pastor to oversee the development of Simple Church,

and yet all tithe, \$31,522.31, has been remitted to the Conference from which it originated. Offerings, amounting to \$15,967.48, have been used by the respective Simple Church locations themselves. Simple Churches are encouraged to use their offerings to help people directly. In other words, Simple Church avoids spending offering money on inventory or asset items. Instead of spending money on organizing programs to help people, Simple Church helps people directly. Total financial income, including the children's missions' offerings of \$376.96, amounted to \$47,866.75, which has come in without ever passing an offering plate.

Strengths and Weaknesses of an Adventist House Church Model

World around, house churches have strengths and weaknesses. The items listed below will primarily be addressed in light of issues facing the development of Adventist house churches in North America.

Weaknesses and Objections

There are several weaknesses and objections for consideration.

The Need Is Vast

A significant and sobering weakness and challenge that house churches in North America face is the nations past Christian history. Regarding church planting movements Sanchez states,

One fact to note is that none of these [church planting] movements occurred in areas where the gospel had already been extensively preached and the church established in previous generations. This is not encouraging as we consider the post-Christian atmosphere of North America. The other side of the North American context is more encouraging. Many areas of North America are several generations away from a

vibrant local Christian witness and in these areas there are encouraging signs.¹

Given this bitter-sweet reality, one must continue to “go,” depending on the One who “is able to accomplish infinitely more than we would ever dare to ask or hope (Eph 3:20).

House and Living Room Size

This may be a problem, but in many cases it is a *perceived* problem—that is it is a blessing in disguise. This is part of the dynamics that “force” a CORE4 and the entire house church to continually think about multiplication.

Simple Church sees this as a blessing in disguise and capitalizes upon it.²

Psychological Value of Large Meetings

One should not downplay the unique dynamics that accompany large meetings. Although outside of the scope of this dissertation, it might be argued that people make different kinds of decisions in large meetings than they do in small group settings.

This is partly why Simple Church plans Fusion gatherings. It helps people realize they are part of something bigger than their house church.³

Unhealthy Personalities

Unhealthy personalities can include a wide range of issues: theological issues, control issues, abusive issues, reactionary issues, disgruntled issues, competitive issues,

¹Sanchez, 90-91.

²Gehring, 302.

³Ibid.

and the list goes on. Some of these issues might be unique to house churches, but some have not yet been solved in established denominational church structures. None-the-less, great care should be taken to avoid these becoming an issue, although one recognizes that when people are involved, there is no guarantee they will not happen.

Simple Church has carefully thought through the training process of CORE4 leaders in an attempt to surface/prevent many of these issues before a CORE4 is cleared for launching.⁴

Relationship Emphasis

In a broken and hurting world, people long for a safe place where they can belong and connect with people who understand them. In this climate it is possible for the ultimate, vertical relationship with God, to become lost and shelved.

Simple Church has built into the Sabbath gathering flow, a relational Bible study that takes people to the Word of God and facilitates a discussion that encourages people to express and articulate how their personal lives dovetail and integrate with God's Word.⁵

Elitist Attitude, a Two Edged Sword

One might naturally think that elitist attitudes express themselves in a country club mentality, as they often do. On the other hand, it has been my experience that some Adventists consider Simple Church to be an elitist group due to the annual ministry and

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

training commitment that Simple Church asks of Adventists who want to get involved in becoming a house church planter. This caught me by surprise and has sent me back to my knees wondering if it is out of line to develop Simple Church as an Adventist front-line mission to North America.

Simple Church is unapologetically front-line missionary minded. This is our work and focus in light of the research included in the previous chapters.⁶

Objections Raised by Adventist Leadership

It is with great appreciation that a number of our denominations leadership and evangelists have personally called me to inquire about Simple Church. It has been my goal to transparently answer all their questions, realizing that there are some areas of development that are still ahead. The following summarizes the common concerns.

What Happens to the Tithe?

Tithe is returned to the originating conference as identified by the location of the CORE4 church planting team.

Doctrinal Purity?

CORE4 training asked each person to choose and complete a Bible study (It Is Written, Discover, or Amazing Facts) or a comparable study sold in the Adventist Book Center. CORE4 are asked to give one mid-week one-on-one Bible study as the opportunities arise. CORE4 and Adventists who are in training are asked to recommit to

⁶Ibid.

the Adventist beliefs each year. CORE4 commit to annual harvest events. This level of commitment, in and of itself, is more intentional than any Seventh-day Adventist Church that I am aware of in North America.⁷

Connected to the World Church?

There are a variety of ways, which include: receiving the *Adventist Review*, union magazines, and local conference magazines. Simple Churches at large attend quarterly Fusion gatherings which include: local conference campmeetings, family camp retreats, and sometimes bringing churches together in a park for a Sabbath of fellowship together. Some conferences who hire lay-pastors invite CORE4 teams to their training and retreat events. *Focus on Mission* is made available to CORE4 to share with their Simple Church. Some of the children attend Adventist schools. Then, of course, there are a number of short term mission trips that are available as is the case for a typical church.

Why More Churches?

Why more churches? We can't fill up the ones we have. The answer to this question might be found in the question itself.⁸

⁷Ibid.

⁸Texas Conference places a high priority on traditional church planting. They have been asked the same question. "A study of one area surrounding Richardson, TX, shows the following: there was only one church in 1999; there are now 10 churches, an increased attendance of 1,350 people, over 1,000 baptisms and 1.25 million in new tithe annually." Taken from the North American Division Church Planter's Xchange, 2009 flyer.

Summary

All of these objections and points of weakness need to be carefully considered, but none of them provide an insurmountable problem. When considered as a whole, and one looks at the strengths and potential that house churches have to offer Adventism, it would not be responsible to dismiss the development of house churches in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. To these strengths we now turn.

Strengths

As we look at these strengths, it is important for us to remember the words of Simson:

If anything positive happens and is achieved through house churches, the ultimate glory will not go to an ingenious system, a fantastic human pastor, an anointed concept, but to the Lamb of God Himself, who has done the humanly impossible and seen His lambs safely through into the final Kingdom. Like Himself, they have been beaten, ridiculed, mocked, harmed, and maybe crucified on earth. But they will rule for ever in His Kingdom to come.⁹

These are significant strengths of which Adventism should be aware.

Money Issues

For 2009, the North American Division did not vote any cost of living increase for denominational employees. In this same year, some conferences have had to vote a salary decrease just to balance budgets. Some denominational leaders have personally told me that in North America tithe has plateaued and will most likely decrease in the coming years.

⁹Simson, 155.

Simple Church is supportive of our world church and therefore sends all tithe to local conferences. Since there are no pastors, stipend pastors, or Bible workers to hire, Simple Church does not financially drain a local conference's financial resources.¹⁰

Building Funds and Maintenance

Church building maintenance, as noted earlier, takes a significant percentage of a local church's offering.¹¹ Kreider and McClung summarize this issue by saying:

There is no way we can build enough church buildings. It becomes a question of stewardship. Can you justify putting 20-30 million dollars into building a church just so that you can add another 1,000 people to a church that already has a couple of thousand people? I am concerned about the 80+ million unchurched Americans. I'm not convinced that our existing structures will draw them in. The house church movement has the potential to do that.

Simple Church capitalizes on the use of homes, thus saving both maintenance expenses and the cost for new buildings. This saving is redirected to helping the needs of people.¹²

The End of the Leader Problem, Almost

After money, and buildings, a third well-worn outcry in the church is, "We do not have enough leaders!" Sahlin confirms this when he researched Adventist members who help lead local churches. Sahlin identified seven leadership roles: worship leader, Sabbath

¹⁰Ibid., 198; Banks, 141; Gehring, 302.

¹¹In the Seventh-day Adventist Church, local churches send all their tithes on to the conference. It is the conference who hires and fires pastoral staff, not the local church. It is also the conference who pays pastoral staff. All other operational expenses come from the offerings, which are above and beyond tithe, which a local church collects.

¹²Ibid, 199; Kreider and McClung, 127; Banks 141.

School leader/teacher, church board member, choir/music leader, leader of a group, member of a committee, and other leadership roles. Of these, he records a twelve to eighteen percent involvement. Different researchers share similar results, but most agree that the smaller the group, the higher the number of people who are involved in leadership. The inverse is also seen, typically the larger the number of members, the lower the number of lay people who get involved. This stands to reason because large churches usually have more professional staff who are expected to do the work.

Simple Church assumes every person is in training to become part of a CORE4 church planting team. This is part of the DNA that is caught as a way of life. Removing the public building and professional staff have significantly helped leadership development to become a reality.¹³

Relational Evangelism

There is a lot of talk given to relational evangelism. In house churches, there is little “competition” in presenting relational evangelism. If a house church is not intentional about building relationships, then relational evangelism will most likely not happen. This has been hard for some to realize. After ten months, some are still waiting for the public evangelistic series to bring them friends.

Simple Church has been patient during this transition and continues to try and implant a relational evangelistic mentality in the DNA.

¹³Simson, 198.

Household Conversion

Often the typical public evangelistic series sees a mixture of families, couples, and individuals making decisions for Christ. Every soul precious, very precious.

Simple Church has noticed a relatively higher percentage of household conversions that also includes extended family. This observation does not come as a surprise if we read how it happened in the New Testament, but it does affirm and help one to better understand the potential of household conversions.¹⁴

Simplifying the Religious Rat Race

Board meetings, elder's meetings, worship team practice, women's ministry meetings, school board meetings, church work bees, men's ministry, weekly bulletins, church newsletters, PowerPoint preparation, sermon and sermon team preparation, prayer meetings, pathfinder programs, deacon/deaconess meetings, mid-week small groups, just to name a few, represent the religious rat race. There is a lot of work involved in keeping the typical church system going. In addition, a church is asked to hold one or two public evangelistic series with child care, and church members are encouraged to take time in their busy schedules to personally witness and give Bible studies.

Simple Church has simplified this rat race by lowering the bar on what it means to

¹⁴Gehring, 229-281; Jewett on biblical issues.

“do church,” and has focused on what it means to “be the church.” Simple Church encourages people to simplify and re-prioritize life so that they have time to hang out with unchurched people, neighbors, work associates, or anyone God invites them to serve.

Decentralization

Decentralization is a delicate balance, especially within a denomination. Decentralization is a word used in the business world. In the church world, the word is “non-denominational.” Both words imply a breaking apart. Adventism sees itself as a world church with people being connected at the local level into the world church.

Simple Church has strived to maintain a balance in avoiding the weaknesses—namely non-denominationalism, and capitalized on the strengths—namely higher levels of personal ownership, responsibility, commitment to the message of Adventism, active witnessing, and leadership development, all at a low-cost approach to church growth.

Persecution

Throughout history, the church has faced persecution.¹⁵ Although, as clarified in chapter one, house churches developed before persecution, they also seemed to thrive during times of persecution. Through the writings of Ellen White¹⁶ we know that near the end of time we will face persecution. At that time it may well be that house churches are

¹⁵Kreider and McClung, 126; Gehring, 303.

¹⁶White, *Evangelism*, 705; Idem., *Acts of the Apostles*, 588.

the only option. Some say, “then wait until that happens.” Simple Church says, “Be a missionary, using principles of missiology where God has planted you. But do it now!”

Ethnicity

God’s people come in every size, shape, and color imaginable. House churches represent this diversity. But there is also a change that is being observed in Adventist churches. People readily talk about church ethnic groups that seem to be growing in North America. In Florida, first generation Hispanics and Jamaicans are among these groups, but Caucasians are considered to be plateaued and declining.

Simple Church has observed a very high percentage of not only Caucasian involvement, but also of Caucasian males who have stepped up to spiritual leadership. Although there have been discussions with the Florida Conference administration as to why this is being observed, more research would need to be done to provide solid conclusions.¹⁷ This observation should not be overlooked in light of both the trends of Caucasian churches and the house church potential for reversing the downward trend of this ethnic group.

The Remaking of a Movement

David Garrison, author of *Church Planting Movements*, identifies ten characteristics of movements as discussed above. He suggests that house churches with their surrounding psychological makeup, significantly contribute to the development of a movement.

¹⁷Payne, 48.

Simple Church hopes to recover a church planting movement in North America, similar to what was seen in early Adventism.

Flexibility

Most people readily agree that the smaller groups and projects are more flexible. This strength provides the opportunity for house churches to adjust on-the-spot, to the needs and context of the people God has supplied.

Simple Church capitalizes on this strength.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It has been an honor and privilege to serve my people, the Seventh-day Adventist Church during the development of this project.

Conclusion

This project set out to develop and plant a single Adventist house church in this author's home that evidenced significant Kingdom growth using natural relational networks in reaching unchurched people. This goal was accomplished and was exceeded by the beginning of a development of an Adventist house church network.

General Recommendations

Adventism's response to this project leads to the following recommendations.

Evaluate Our Current Use of Resources

People are our greatest resource. Sahlin and Kidder both confirm that however one describes or explains our present church system, the end result of Adventists

embracing the mission and message in North America is not encouraging. In general, Adventist lay people do not personally own the mission of our church. And it is understandable, because they do not need to. Professional pastors and Bible workers are hired to carry out our mission. What would it take for every Adventist to own our mission and for every Adventist to become a missionary to North America?

Money is a second great potential resource, if one is not controlled by it. When churches across North America spend sixty-four percent of budget dollars on paid staff and thirty percent on building maintenance,¹⁸ in addition to new building funds, is this good stewardship? This question needs sober evaluation.

Unsettle Settled Pastors

It has taken years in North America to get to the place where most Adventist churches hope and dream of the day when they will have their “own” pastors. It may take years to return to our Adventist roots. But two catalysts can expedite this process: persecution and lack of finances.

But what if our church were to begin the process of unsettling the settled pastors based on biblical principles and upon the counsel Ellen White gave our church? Looking at past evidence, the unsettling of many of Adventist’s settled pastors could significantly contribute to the revival and lay ownership of the Seventh-day Adventist message.

Organize Missionally

Organization is beneficial. Our current organization is what provided the umbrella

¹⁸Tenny-Brittian, 67-68. Also see appendix E for additional information.

for Simple Church to develop. Again, the “end product” provides the basis of evaluation. How can we reorganize and restructure ourselves so that we remove the barriers within our control,¹⁹ which are hindering missional life among Adventist people?

Division and Union Recommendations

One of Adventism’s leading evangelists told me that “it is not a question of if house churches will sweep Adventism in North America, it is a question of when. This will happen whether or not we like it.” “Part of my job,” continued the evangelist, “is to help our church proactively lead the way.”²⁰

Granted, there are two ditches to avoid. One ditch would be a blind and simplistic development of Adventist house churches that would lead to a disaster where the church would have to pick up the pieces. The other ditch would be ignoring house churches and being forced to deal with them after the fact. There is a healthy missional balance that must be walked.

The North American Division has already been very supportive, as is evidenced by a house church summit at SEEDS 2009. All the conference presidents are personally invited to attend this summit. This step is a blessing. It shows a willingness to grow and learn, even though there a number of concerns. Missionary work, whether here or overseas, requires the charting of new methods—which is actually a very old new idea.

¹⁹Natural Church Development would argue that every organism, of which is the church, should naturally grow and reproduce unless there are factors hindering it. Factors are both within one’s control as well as outside of one’s control. To remove factors within one’s control does not guarantee growth and reproduction. But to not address the facts that are within one’s control is not responsible stewardship. Schwarz, 12.

²⁰Mark Finley, a private conversation during the Net 2008 meetings held in Orlando, FL.

The North American Division is encouraged to continue an openness to Adventist house church development. It is also encouraged to continue to incorporate Simple Church into key events, providing exposure and visual support.

One union president has invited Simple Church to be developed in his jurisdiction. Recognizing that such a decision is in the hand of a local conference, it is a step in a helpful direction to have a union president encourage such an initiative.

Adventist Seminary Recommendations

Simple Church “home-grows” its leadership base. Like my great grandfather, when he wanted to become an evangelist circuit-riding pastor he set up an appointment with the Iowa conference president. The president counseled him, “Go out, raise up a church, and then come and talk with us in a couple of years.” That is exactly what my great grandfather and each of his four brothers did. Simple Church resembles this early Adventist approach. Lay people raise up and then multiply their house church. In time a conference “circuit-riding” coordinator is stipend by Simple Church who has evidenced his or her leadership and coaching skills by first raising up and multiplying their own house churches. In time a local conference may deem best to hire this person as a full-time dedicated Simple Church coordinator. It might be advantageous for Adventist seminaries to offer a customized six to twelve month Simple Church practical certification to focus on strengthening the pragmatic skills of coaching and mentoring Simple Churches in a local conference.

Local Conference Recommendation

A local conference president and his administration hold the key as to whether they will formally invite Simple Church to develop, or will actively or passively block its development.

It is recommended that local conferences invite Simple Church to provide another way to reach people who are not being reached by typical church methods.

Summary

As early as 1995, Leonard Sweet, Christian futurist, said, “The best way into the postmodern home is through the family.” Gehring, who brings Sweet’s statement to our attention continues, “He states that three of the most significant developments in education, medicine, and religion during this period were ‘mushrooming movements toward home schools, home births, and *home churches*.’”²¹ Now, fourteen years have passed since Sweet “predicted” the rise and development of house churches. One sees he was on track. House churches are well established and continue to grow in numbers.

How will Adventism relate to this opportunity? Although indicators point in a positive direction, it is premature to assess Adventism’s ability and/or willingness to embrace and develop this opportunity. If Adventism is willing to count the cost and make room for house churches to develop under the umbrella of the established church, they will capitalize upon and earn the right and ability to influence this development. This, however, will not be easy as the cost must be counted.

²¹Leonard Sweet, *FaithQuakes* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 29, quoted in Gehring, 311.

House churches, specifically Simple Church, operate out of a decentralized, grass-roots paradigm that is faithful to the Seventh-day Adventist mission. This paradigm intentionally recaptures the New Testament and early Adventist roots by eliminating the built-in conflict of interest, namely, the professional clergy/lay person distinction. This elimination, in and of itself, naturally empowers lay people to become Adventist front-line missionaries. The “monkey jumps” as lay people realize that if they do not become missionaries, there are no professional clergy or Bible workers to whom they can shift their missionary responsibility. This awareness both calls and invites lay people to step up to the plate and once again take ownership of the unique message God has invited Seventh-day Adventists to share with the world—beginning with their unchurched neighbors.

How Do I Start a Simple Church?

First, go to www.SimpleChurchAtHome.com and complete Phase One training.

Second, raise up a CORE4 team and take them through Phase One.

Third, after your CORE4 team has completed Phase One, contact the Simple Church Network and we will walk you through the next steps to become a CORE4 front-line missionary team.

Phases Two connects you with the Simple Church Network, continues your online training that is unique to Simple Church, begins the live coaching process, mentors you as you build your CORE4 planting team, and eventually teaches you how to train other Simple Church CORE4 planting teams.

Simple Church is not “Easy Church.” Simple Church is like an iPod. To the end

user (in our case the unchurched people we are reaching) it is very simple and refreshing. But open up the iPod and one will soon discover an intentionally well designed infrastructure to accomplish its mission. So is Simple Church, simple and refreshing on the outside, yet on the inside, intentionally designed to reach unchurched people with the Everlasting Gospel of Jesus Christ.

A Last Minute Update

As of Sabbath November 7, 2009, approximately seven months after the close of this project, one additional group has been planted, bringing the network total to four locations, with each location averaging sixteen people, for a total network attendance of sixty-four people. An additional four locations have begun meeting, but they have not officially launched. Approximately thirteen doctrinal Bible studies are being shared each week. Twenty-one people are in Phase Two training, two more people will be baptized this Sabbath, and a total of \$85,060.71 has come in without ever passing an offering plate.

On Sabbath, November 7, 2009, the mother location witnessed twenty-five people in attendance, with forty-four percent being unchurched secular people. Beginning next Sabbath, two more CORE4 teams who live locally will be joining the mother location for two months. They plan to launch in January 2010.

From a world perspective, one additional conference has formally voted Simple Church. Four more conferences are just beginning to explore partnering with the Simple Church Network. Two Trans-European Division conferences and one South Pacific Division conference have decided to partner with the network beginning 2010.

APPENDIX A¹

CHURCH GROWTH PERCENTAGES

In 1863 the Seventh-day Adventist church was organized. There was a big debate on whether organization was biblical, or whether it was the way of the world. Finally, the early Adventist's came to a decision. To efficiently fulfill mission, organization was necessary. And praise God that they did! The church began to grow.

Early statistics are hard to come by. We can estimate the church membership was about 3,500 when the general conference was formed in 1863.²

During those first 37 years the church saw some wonderful growth (some years growing by around 20%). Overall, between the years 1863 and 1900 the church grew on average 8.9% per year. That's good consistent growth.

Remember compounding interest? It works with church growth too. The church was exploding! By 1900 instead of 3,500, we find church membership up to 75,767,³ over twenty-one times its original size. And it only had to grow 8.9% per year to get there.

I wonder what the church leaders were thinking around 1900? Some may have thought, "Okay, we have growth on average 8.9% each year for the last 37 years. How long will it take to reach the world?"

Their calculations may have looked something like this.

Projected Growth to 1 Billion Members

Year	Projected at 8.9% growth per year
1900	75,676
1910	178,003
1920	418,191
1930	982,476
1940	2,308,178
1950	5,422,716

¹Thanks to the work of Lonnie Wibberding, a pastor in the Pennsylvania Conference of Seventh-day Adventist, the appendix contains statical information compiled from information found on the www.AdventistStatistics.org web page showing Adventist church growth trends. His book *Fire Your Pastor: The Hope of a Lost World* can be ordered from Amazon or downloaded for free from www.FireYourPastor.com

²1863-1900 report found at www.AdventistStatistics.org

³www.AdventistStatistics.org

1960	12,739,852
1970	29,930,359
1980	70,316,858
1990	165,198,840
2000	388,109,729
2008	768,621,552
2010	911,805,200
2012	1,081,661,998

It would have been reasonable knowing annual growth rates for 37 years in 1900 to predict reaching 1 billion people with the Gospel by 2012. That would be reasonable. However, if you are familiar with membership numbers of the Adventist Church you know we have around 16 million members in 2008, not 768 million.

What happened? Unfortunately, the growth rate of 8.9% per year did not keep up. Here are actual growth rates for each decade since 1900.

Actual Membership Growth since 1900

Year	Percentage	Membership ⁴
1900-10	3.2%	100,931
1910-20	5.8%	178,239
1920-30	5.3%	299,555
1930-40	5.0%	486,670
1940-50	3.9%	716,538
1950-60	5.2%	1,194,070
1960-70	5.0%	1,953,078
1970-80	5.4%	3,308,191
1980-90	6.6%	6,260,617
1990-2000	5.7%	10,939,182
2001	6.8%	11,687,239
2002	5.4%	12,320,844
2003	4.7%	12,894,015
2004	4.0%	13,406,554
2005	4.0%	13,936,932

Never again in any decade do we find a worldwide growth rate of over 6.6%, let alone an average of 8.9%

⁴Membership at end of decade.

APPENDIX B⁵

TABLE OF ACTUAL AND PROJECTED GROWTH 1863 TO 1900⁶

The following table lists growth rates of the Adventist Church by year. To be exact it is 8.91677%. From 1863 this percentage is added to the next year and so on until we get to 1900. This has the affect of compounding membership yearly. You will notice in 1900 both the projected growth and the actual growth is the same number. This confirms that the average growth rate of just over 8.9% is indeed the average for the first 37 years of the Adventist Church.

Year	Members	Annual Growth	Average Growth at 8.9%
1863	3,500		3,500
1864	3,800	8.57%	3,812
1865	4,000	5.26%	4,152
1866	4,250	6.25%	4,522
1867	4,320	1.65%	4,925
1868	4,475	3.59%	5,365
1869	4,900	9.50%	5,843
1870	5,440	11.02%	6,364
1871	4,550	-16.36%	6,931
1872	4,901	7.71%	7,550
1873	5,875	19.87%	8,223
1875	8,042	36.89%	8,956
1876	10,044	24.89%	9,755
1877	11,608	15.57%	10,624
1878	13,077	12.66%	11,572
1879	14,141	8.14%	12,603
1880	15,570	10.11%	13,727
1881	16,916	8.64%	14,951
1882	17,169	1.50%	16,284
1883	17,317	0.86%	17,737
1884	18,702	8.00%	19,318
1885	20,547	9.87%	21,041

⁵Thanks to the work of Lonnie Wibberding, a pastor in the Pennsylvania Conference of Seventh-day Adventist, the appendix contains statical information compiled from information found on the www.AdventistStatistics.org web page showing Adventist church growth trends. His book *Fire Your Pastor: The Hope of a Lost World* can be ordered from Amazon or downloaded for free from, www.FireYourPastor.com

⁶www.AdventistStatistics.org

1886	23,111	12.48%	22,917
1887	25,841	11.81%	24,960
1888	26,112	1.05%	27,186
1889	28,324	8.47%	29,610
1890	29,711	4.90%	32,250
1891	31,665	6.58%	35,126
1892	33,778	6.67%	38,258
1893	37,404	10.73%	41,669
1894	42,763	14.33%	45,385
1895	47,680	11.50%	49,432
1896	52,202	9.48%	53,839
1897	56,426	8.09%	58,640
1898	59,347	5.18%	63,869
1899	64,003	7.85%	69,564
1900	75,767	18.38%	75,767

APPENDIX C⁷

GROWTH TRENDS IN NORTH AMERICA 1913-2006

Growth since separate statistics were kept for the North American division in 1913 has been minimal. The average growth during these years is 2.916819%. The year by year data follows:

Year	Membership	Growth Rate	Average Annual Growth
1913	71,863		71,863
1914	72,015	0.21%	73,959
1915	77,735	7.94%	76,116
1916	79,946	2.84%	78,337
1917	87,222	9.10%	80,621
1918	91,972	5.45%	82,973
1919	95,645	3.99%	85,393
1920	95,877	0.24%	87,884
1921	98,715	2.96%	90,447
1922	101,129	2.45%	93,086
1923	102,797	1.65%	95,801
1924	106,941	4.03%	98,595
1925	108,802	1.74%	101,471
1926	110,422	1.49%	104,431
1927	112,276	1.68%	107,477
1928	113,737	1.30%	110,612
1929	117,771	3.55%	113,838
1930	120,560	2.37%	117,158
1931	127,787	5.99%	120,576
1932	135,837	6.30%	124,093
1933	143,777	5.85%	127,712
1934	151,216	5.17%	131,437
1935	157,507	4.16%	135,271
1936	161,271	2.39%	139,217
1937	164,490	2.00%	143,277
1938	171,214	4.09%	147,457
1939	177,341	3.58%	151,758

⁷Thanks to the work of Lonnie Wibberding, a pastor in the Pennsylvania Conference of Seventh-day Adventist, the appendix contains statical information compiled from information found on the www.AdventistStatistics.org web page showing Adventist church growth trends. His book *Fire Your Pastor: The Hope of a Lost World* can be ordered from Amazon or downloaded for free from www.FireYourPastor.com

1940	185,788	4.76%	156,184
1941	191,333	2.98%	160,740
1942	197,215	3.07%	165,428
1943	201,111	1.98%	170,253
1944	206,908	2.88%	175,219
1945	212,514	2.71%	180,330
1946	220,122	3.58%	185,590
1947	228,179	3.66%	191,004
1948	235,460	3.19%	196,575
1949	243,193	3.28%	202,308
1950	251,039	3.23%	208,209
1951	260,185	3.64%	214,283
1952	268,533	3.21%	220,533
1953	275,733	2.68%	226,965
1954	285,777	3.64%	233,585
1955	293,448	2.68%	240,399
1956	299,984	2.23%	247,411
1957	308,695	2.90%	254,627
1958	318,939	3.32%	262,054
1959	325,882	2.18%	269,698
1960	332,364	1.99%	277,565
1961	343,664	3.40%	285,661
1962	351,048	2.15%	293,993
1963	361,878	3.09%	302,568
1964	370,688	2.43%	311,393
1965	380,855	2.74%	320,476
1966	391,014	2.67%	329,824
1967	401,970	2.80%	339,444
1968	419,841	4.45%	349,345
1969	426,295	1.54%	359,535
1970	439,726	3.15%	370,022
1971	454,096	3.27%	380,815
1972	470,622	3.64%	391,923
1973	486,601	3.40%	403,354
1974	503,689	3.51%	415,119
1975	520,842	3.41%	427,228
1976	536,649	3.03%	439,689
1977	551,884	2.84%	452,514
1978	566,453	2.64%	465,713
1979	585,050	3.28%	479,297
1980	604,430	3.31%	493,277
1981	622,961	3.07%	507,665
1982	642,317	3.11%	522,473

1983	660,253	2.79%	537,713
1984	676,204	2.42%	553,397
1985	689,507	1.97%	569,538
1986	704,515	2.18%	586,151
1987	715,260	1.53%	603,248
1988	727,561	1.72%	620,843
1989	743,023	2.13%	638,952
1990	760,148	2.30%	657,589
1991	776,848	2.20%	676,770
1992	793,594	2.16%	696,510
1993	807,601	1.77%	716,826
1994	822,150	1.80%	737,734
1995	838,898	2.04%	759,253
1996	858,364	2.32%	781,399
1997	875,811	2.03%	804,191
1998	891,176	1.75%	827,648
1999	914,106	2.57%	851,789
2000	933,935	2.17%	876,634
2001	955,076	2.26%	902,204
2002	974,271	2.01%	928,519
2003	992,046	1.82%	955,602
2004	1,006,317	1.44%	983,476
2005	1,024,035	1.76%	1,012,162
2006	1,041,685	1.72%	1,041,685

APPENDIX D⁸

WORLDWIDE GROWTH SINCE 1901

The growth data for the entire General Conference is better than that of North America. This includes divisions where pastors are settled and those which are not. The average annual growth rate for the entire church from 1901 to 2006 is 5.1229774%.

Year	Membership	Growth Rate	Average Growth rate
1901	78,188	3.2%	79,649
1902	73,522	-6.0%	83,729
1903	77,554	5.5%	88,018
1904	81,721	5.4%	92,527
1905	87,311	6.8%	97,268
1906	91,531	4.8%	102,251
1907	94,048	2.7%	107,489
1908	97,579	3.8%	112,996
1909	100,931	3.4%	118,784
1910	104,526	3.6%	124,870
1911	108,975	4.3%	131,267
1912	114,206	4.8%	137,991
1913	122,386	7.2%	145,061
1914	125,844	2.8%	152,492
1915	136,879	8.8%	160,304
1916	141,488	3.4%	168,517
1917	153,857	8.7%	177,150
1918	162,667	5.7%	186,225
1919	178,239	9.6%	195,765
1920	185,450	4.0%	205,794
1921	198,088	6.8%	216,337
1922	208,771	5.4%	227,420
1923	221,874	6.3%	239,071
1924	238,657	7.6%	251,318
1925	250,988	5.2%	264,193
1926	261,834	4.3%	277,728
1927	274,064	4.7%	291,956

⁸Thanks to the work of Lonnie Wibberding, a pastor in the Pennsylvania Conference of Seventh-day Adventist, the appendix contains statical information compiled from information found on the www.AdventistStatistics.org web page showing Adventist church growth trends. His book *Fire Your Pastor: The Hope of a Lost World* can be ordered from Amazon or downloaded for free from www.FireYourPastor.com

1928	285,293	4.1%	306,912
1929	299,555	5.0%	322,635
1930	314,253	4.9%	339,164
1931	336,046	6.9%	356,539
1932	362,101	7.8%	374,805
1933	384,151	6.1%	394,006
1934	404,509	5.3%	414,191
1935	422,968	4.6%	435,410
1936	438,139	3.6%	457,715
1937	452,758	3.3%	481,164
1938	469,951	3.8%	505,814
1939	486,670	3.6%	531,727
1940	504,752	3.7%	558,967
1941	520,644	3.1%	587,603
1942	535,134	2.8%	617,706
1943	544,710	1.8%	649,350
1944	557,768	2.4%	682,617
1945	576,378	3.3%	717,587
1946	598,683	3.9%	754,349
1947	628,594	5.0%	792,994
1948	672,658	7.0%	833,619
1949	716,538	6.5%	876,325
1950	756,812	5.6%	921,219
1951	803,720	6.2%	968,413
1952	856,463	6.6%	1,018,024
1953	924,822	8.0%	1,070,177
1954	972,071	5.1%	1,125,002
1955	1,006,218	3.5%	1,182,636
1956	1,051,452	4.5%	1,243,222
1957	1,102,910	4.9%	1,306,912
1958	1,149,256	4.2%	1,373,865
1959	1,194,070	3.9%	1,444,247
1960	1,245,125	4.3%	1,518,236
1961	1,307,892	5.0%	1,596,015
1962	1,362,775	4.2%	1,677,778
1963	1,428,352	4.8%	1,763,731
1964	1,508,056	5.6%	1,854,086
1965	1,578,504	4.7%	1,949,070
1966	1,661,657	5.3%	2,048,921
1967	1,747,614	5.2%	2,153,887
1968	1,845,183	5.6%	2,264,230
1969	1,953,078	5.8%	2,380,226
1970	2,051,864	5.1%	2,502,164
1971	2,145,061	4.5%	2,630,349

1972	2,261,403	5.4%	2,765,102
1973	2,390,124	5.7%	2,906,757
1974	2,521,429	5.5%	3,055,670
1975	2,666,484	5.8%	3,212,211
1976	2,810,606	5.4%	3,376,772
1977	2,949,758	5.0%	3,549,763
1978	3,117,535	5.7%	3,731,617
1979	3,308,191	6.1%	3,922,787
1980	3,480,518	5.2%	4,123,750
1981	3,668,087	5.4%	4,335,009
1982	3,897,814	6.3%	4,557,090
1983	4,140,206	6.2%	4,790,549
1984	4,424,612	6.9%	5,035,968
1985	4,716,859	6.6%	5,293,959
1986	5,092,503	8.0%	5,565,168
1987	5,445,249	6.9%	5,850,270
1988	5,816,767	6.8%	6,149,978
1989	6,260,617	7.6%	6,465,040
1990	6,694,880	6.9%	6,796,242
1991	7,102,976	6.1%	7,144,412
1992	7,498,653	5.6%	7,510,419
1993	7,962,210	6.2%	7,895,176
1994	8,382,558	5.3%	8,299,644
1995	8,812,555	5.1%	8,724,833
1996	9,296,127	5.5%	9,171,804
1997	9,702,834	4.4%	9,641,674
1998	10,163,414	4.7%	10,135,614
1999	10,939,182	7.6%	10,654,860
2000	11,687,239	6.8%	11,200,706
2001	12,320,844	5.4%	11,774,515
2002	12,894,015	4.7%	12,377,721
2003	13,406,554	4.0%	13,011,829
2004	13,936,932	4.0%	13,678,422
2005	14,399,072	3.3%	14,379,164
2006	15,115,806	5.0%	15,115,806

APPENDIX E

NORTH AMERICAN CHRISTIAN LANDSCAPE

The following information provides a better scope of the North American Christian landscape. In a number of instances researchers give varying conclusions which are also included to provide a depth in the landscape. Common themes are grouped together:

“The U.S. ranks third behind China and India in the number of unsaved people. Evangelical churches have failed to gain an additional 2 percent of the American population in the past 50 years. In other words, we are not even reaching our own children.” Larry Kreider and Floyd McClung, *Starting a House Church: A New Model for Living Out Your Faith* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2007), 62.

“American Christians tend to believe we are the most churched country in the world. The reality, however, is that the United States is the fourth largest unchurched population in the world.” Sanchez, 19.

“Most neighborhood churches see gatherings between 40 and 80 people. Most of these churches haven’t baptized a new member in years.” Ibid.

Approximately 3,500 to 4,000 churches close their doors for the last time each year, while 1,100 to 1,500 churches are started each year. Ibid.

David Olson, in one of his American Church Crisis PowerPoints, says that between 2000 and 2005, 4,009 churches started each year, and 3,707 churches closed each year. Olson, “The State of the American Church 2006” PowerPoint, 27.

“Three times more churches are closing than opening.” William Tenny-Brittian, *House Church Manual* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2005), 2.

“Well-known researches are speaking of at least 80 percent of the churches being stagnant or declining in growth.” *Ibid.*, 18.

“Statistics right across the Western world . . . indicate that the *vast majority* of the church’s growth comes from ‘switchers’—people who move from one church to another based on the perception and experience of the programming. There is precious little conversion growth.” Hirsch, 45.

“In a typical week, 9 percent of the U.S. adults attend a house church.” “In absolute numbers, that 9 percent equals roughly 20 million people.” “This study counted only attendance at house churches, not small groups (or cells) that are part of a traditional church.” George Barna study quoted in Kreider and McClung, 130-131. Also see George Barna, 11.

“Revolutionaries will respond to the presence and principles of ‘God whenever and wherever possible, without regard to historical or societal inhibitions.’ The standard that concerns Revolutionaries is simple: does the mechanism provide a way of advancing my faith, without compromising Scripture or any of the passions of a true believer?” Barna, *Revolution*, 67.

“The church in America is losing more than three million people each year.” Tenny-Brittian, 2.

“This is the future of the American Church Attendance Percentage if Nothing Changes.” 1990, 20.4%; 2000, 18.7%; 2007, 17.0%; 2010 (est), 16.2%; 2020 (est), 14.2%; 2050 (est), 10.5%. Olson, PowerPoint slide, 35.

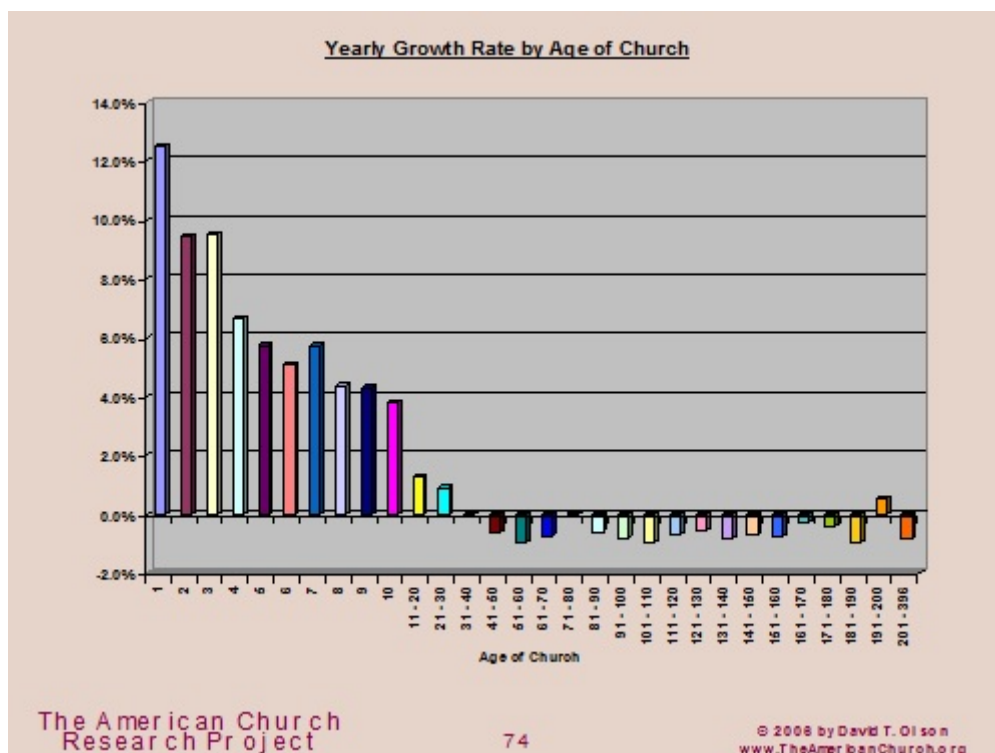
“Fuller Theological Seminary did a research study that found that if a church is 10 or more years old, it takes 85 people to lead 1 person to Christ. If the church is between 4

and 7 years old, it takes 7 people to lead 1 person to Christ. If a church is less than 3 years old, it takes only 3 people to lead 1 person to Christ. Kreider & McClung, 30-31. Also, Thom Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 29.

“While the larger churches grew according to expectation, [which is less than small church growth], the smallest churches actually grew at a faster yearly rate. The churches that declined most were those with a weekly attendance between 100 and 299.” Churches between 400-499 and 400-999 grew at a 0.0% and 0.1% respectively. “Bigger is synonymous with better. In one sense, Christians who leave smaller churches to attend larger churches are ‘upgrading to first class,’” which accounts for most of the large church growth. David Olson, *The American Church in Crisis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 86-87.

The American Church Research Project by David T. Olson, 2006.

www.TheAmericanChurch.org (see following graph).



The average church in the United States will spend as much as 64 percent of its budget on staff salaries. Additionally, it will spend as much as 30 percent of its offerings on maintaining its building. Tenny-Brittian, 67-68.

“It is estimated that it takes over two hundred thousand dollars to launch a church in America.” Roger Thoman, *Simple/House Church Revolution* (Apple Seed Publications, 2008), 7, <http://www.appleseedpublications.com> (accessed November 2007).

“In virtually every study we conduct, representing thousands of interviews every year, born-again Christians fail to display much attitudinal or behavioral evidence of transformed lives. For instance, based on a study released in 2007, we found that most of

the lifestyle activities of born-again Christians were statistically equivalent to those of non-born-again. When asked to identify their activities over the last thirty days, born-again believers were just as likely to bet or gamble, to visit a pornographic website, to take something that did not belong to them, to consult a medium or psychic, to physically fight or abuse someone, to have consumed enough alcohol to be considered legally drunk, to have used an illegal, nonprescription drug, to have said something to someone that was not true, to have gotten back at someone for something he or she did, and to have said mean things behind another person's back. To give you a balanced view of the data, there were a handful of areas that showed slight divergence in behavior. For instance, born-again Christians were less likely than non-born-again to use profanity in public (26 percent versus 38 percent) or to have bought a lottery ticket (26 percent versus 34 percent) in the last thirty days. Recycling was less common among born-again Christians (68 percent versus 79 percent), but they were slightly more likely to say they had helped a poor or homeless person in their community (53 percent versus 45 percent). This represents a mix of good news and bad—there are some areas of distinction, but in practical terms these differences are not very large.” David Kinnaman, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 47.

“Here is what all of this boils down to—and, I believe, one of the most important findings of our research for this book: among young outsiders, *84 percent* say they personally know at least one committed Christian. Yet just *15 percent* thought the lifestyles of those Christ followers were significantly different from the norm. This gap speaks volumes. *Ibid.*, 48.

APPENDIX F

HOUSE CHURCH NETWORKS

United States, Chris Houser, <http://www.eastvalleyhousechurch.org/maps/natmap.htm>. This list includes individual links to approximately 21 networks.

House Church Central, <http://www.hccentral.com/directory/index.html>, claims to be a worldwide house church registry. The “New Home Churches” link lists locations that have been added in the past 60 days.

Texas, Austin, Tony and Felicity Dale, <http://www.house2house.com>. House2house offers a house church map where people can register their house church as well as find one in their area. It is estimated that about 175 house churches are identified on this web page map.

Texas, Dallas, <http://www.dallashousechurch.wordpress.com/dallas-area-house-churches> is most like a Southern Baptist network. Joe Cartwright, Jim Mellon, and Dave Underwood are the key people behind this network.

Colorado, Denver, John White, <http://www.housechurchresource.org>. This web page also provides a way to find house churches located in your area, but you have to fill out a required form. White is also associated with DAWN Ministries, listed below.

Summit, Dan and Jodi Mayhew, <http://www.summithome.org>. “Summit Fellowships are a community of small-group churches in Portland, Oregon, and Vancouver, Washington. Typically numbering about 12 to 20 persons, they meet in neighborhoods, businesses, college campuses---wherever a small group of people can congregate. Each small group is a functionally autonomous congregation that is

voluntarily interdependent with other fellowships of similar vision.”⁹ These follow a more “purist” form of house churches.

Hawaii, Robert Fitts, <http://www.propheticliving.com>. Fitts’ web page claims 24 house churches that are spread all over North America.

Arizona, Phoenix, <http://www.phoenixhousechurch.org>. This web page contains a list of about 24 house churches, with links to their individual house church web pages.

Seattle, Washington, Bill Easum, <http://www.hcna.us>. These networks are part of a mainline denomination and connected with <http://www.therockcc.us>.

Mike Steele with DAWN Ministries is said to be networking the networks, but surprisingly little is provided on his web page, <http://www.dawnministries.org>, except to say that “with a population of three hundred million and over 350,000 churches in the US alone, some have questioned the need for a DAWN strategy in North America. Sadly, it is one of the neediest continents in the world.”¹⁰

Neil Cole is well known in house church circles. On his web page, <http://www.cmaresources.org>, he says, “CMA is a growing family of organic church networks. Each network began with a team that had a heart to see their region discipled and churched. Many have outgrown that original team and location. Each network has its own identity, strengths and weaknesses.”¹¹

As house churches populate the landscape, many may connect with a network.

⁹Accessed February 2, 2009.

¹⁰<http://www.dawnministries.org/where-we-work/north-america> (accessed February 4, 2009.)

¹¹<http://cmaresources.org/networks> (accessed February 2, 2009).

APPENDIX G

ADDITIONAL HOUSE CHURCH AND NETWORK CHARACTERISTICS

Network Leaders: In most cases, house church networks are born and led by one person, and in some cases, two or three people. In very few cases have these leaders been assigned this responsibility. Most could be classified as, to use business terminology, “entrepreneurs.” House church terminology calls them “modern day apostles.” Neil Cole says it this way, “We look for church planters that are apostolically oriented. You send a pastor or a teacher to do a church planting job and they will stick with that. You have to send an apostle or a prophet if you want to start a movement.”¹² In many instances, network leaders have left jobs in order to develop a house church network. This process often starts with one house church plant, but their vision expands, and it is that vision that pushes them. This is sometimes referred to as an apostolic vision.

Leader Educational Levels:

Our study removed the stereotype that leaders are involved in house churches because they are uneducated and, therefore, are not eligible to serve in more established church settings. Twenty-five of the thirty-three leaders surveyed (76 percent) had a college degree level of education or higher, with the average level of education consisting of some graduate studies. Our team noted that some of these leaders were alumni of Northwest Graduate School, Fuller Theological Seminary, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Asbury Theological Seminary, Concordia Seminary, Denver Seminary, Grace Theological Seminary, and Talbot Theological Seminary.

¹²Neil Cole, “Starting Organic Congregations in Church Planting Movements,” *Church Planting Movements in North America* (Fort Worth, TX: Church Starting Network, 2006), 509.

Of the leaders surveyed, four had doctoral degrees and two had completed some doctoral studies.¹³

Network Finances: Not all house churches participate in a network, and therefore would naturally not contribute. But house churches who do participate, often participate in supporting the network, and more specifically the network leaders. Kreider and McClung report, “We split the finances 50/50, with one-half of the tithes and offerings going to the Net and one-half staying with the house church. And it’s working! People are excited about planting churches again!”¹⁴ This was the highest percentage given to a network that this author found.¹⁵ Other networks gave ten percent of all donations to the network.¹⁶ It is most common in today’s house church networks for the

¹³Payne, 60-61.

This has also been the experience of the Simple Church Network. When one looks at the professions and educational levels of the leaders, there are nurses, hospital CEOs, dental hygienists, politicians, and various kinds of tradesmen; as well as those who have a master’s degree in nursing, theology, public health, and education.

¹⁴Kreider and McClung, 150.

¹⁵In the Adventist Simple Church Network, 100 percent of tithe is given to the “network/conference” which averages about sixty-six percent of total contributions. This is one area where Adventist will vary from other networks, including denominational house church networks. Adventist are a world church, and tithe is used for the worldwide work. But with no offering needed for local-hires, buildings, or maintenance, there is a significant amount left to be directly invested in the needs of the people being reached.

¹⁶Russell Burrill, also quoting James White, makes an interesting observation with regards to apostolic church/network planters, although he does not use the apostolic terminology. “If you couldn’t raise up a church that was self supporting, you could not be paid as a clergy:

In no way can a preacher so well prove himself as in entering new fields. There he can see the fruits of his own labors. And if he be successful in raising up churches, and establishing them, so that they bear good fruits, he gives to his brethren the best proofs that he is sent of the Lord.

actual house church leaders to be lay leaders and the network leaders to be paid or given a stipend, as this has become their full-time job.

Network Size: Network size varies from two to twenty-five house churches in a given network. It is this author's assumption that the networks requiring higher accountability to be part of the network, see decreasing numbers of house church buy-ins and vice versa.¹⁷ This is often determined by the people who make up a given house church and their willingness to be "accountable" to the wider body of Christ.

House Church Size: As already noted in the chapter, Biblical Foundations, house churches ranged in size, but tended to cap at about forty people. House church advocates would argue that "wherever two or three are gathered in My name, there I am," means that a two-person gathering can be called a house church.¹⁸

Some who join the Seventh-day Adventists commence at once to preach to the brethren, many of whom are far in advance of them. And our brethren often err in urging such to spend their time in preaching to them. Let such ministers first be suitably instructed by those of experience in the message, then let them go out into new fields, trusting in God for help and success. And when they shall have raised up churches, and shall have properly instructed them, then those churches will support them. If they cannot raise up churches and friends to sustain them, then certainly the cause of truth has no need of them, and they have the best reasons for concluding that they made a sad mistake when they thought that God called them to teach the third angel's message. James White, *Review and Herald*, vol. 19, no. 20 (April 15, 1862), 156. Quoted in Russell Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life & Mission of the Local Church* (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Books, 1998), 157-158.

Could it be that our current ministerial educational system has put the cart before the horse? As it has been said before, when you raise up a church, the 'proof is in the pudding'; one does not need a certificate/diploma that says one is qualified to do the job.

¹⁷The Adventist Simple Church, at the time of writing, has planted three house churches in eight months. Each house church already has people in training who will begin to multiply out in the next six to nine months.

¹⁸Adventist Simple Churches begin with a CORE4 planting team. Two people function as co-leaders who lead out on Sabbath, but this leadership is not limited to these

House Church Organizational Age: One research study considered the age of a given house church. Of the thirty-three qualifying churches Payne accepted into his research project, there were several who had been in existence for over ten years,¹⁹ yet it appears that the minimal organizational age was four years for the house churches Payne included in his study.

Pyramid or Flat Structure: Denominational churches, independent churches, and the recent cell church paradigm follow a pyramid structure. “The house church has, in comparison, a flat structure.”²⁰ One could technically argue that a pyramid still exists, but for practical purposes it is relatively flat. One exception to this would be house church networks that existed within a denominational structure. The denomination might be pyramidal, which makes the network part of that pyramid, but one also needs to evaluate the structure of the house church network within the denomination, which means, it is possible to have a relatively flat house church network operating within the umbrella of a denominational pyramid.²¹

Collective Gatherings: “There is a place for large meetings, because they

two. All four work together. One functions as the Details Coordinator (assistant clerk and treasurer, accountable to the Conference Details Coordinator) and one functions as the Host Coordinator. Others have suggested a base of five to six baptized believers to plant a church. (Atkins, 111.) The reason for a CORE4 is two-fold. Jesus sent His disciples out two by two. Simple Church typically used two families to create a CORE4. Secondly, when two families start, they realize that if they do not get serious about raising up a church, they will not survive. Given our Adventist “come and sit” mentality, this has aided in the CORE4 embracing the gospel commission. There is nobody else to blame or to whom we may point a finger.

¹⁹Payne, 76.

²⁰Simson, 143.

²¹This is the case with regards to the Adventist Simple Church Network.

encourage people to remember that they are part of something bigger than themselves. Large celebrations inspire faith and point the way forward for the whole congregation or network of churches.”²² Most networks report getting together at least once a year, while others report as much as once a month.²³

Denominational Affiliation: It should be of no surprise that most house churches are not connected with a denomination. But this may have more to do with the denominational attitudes towards house churches. Payne’s research revealed a subjective feeling among house church leaders “that they were looked on unfavorably by the denomination.”²⁴ But this might be more of a perceived attitude given the fact that some denominations and independent churches are favorable towards house churches. Having said this, it is a mixed bag as this author has experienced unfavorable comments from pastors, primarily, yet rather favorable support from Adventist denominational leadership.

Gehring sheds additional perspective when he says, “House church models that are most vital on a long-term basis, and thus the most convincing, are the ones that are well integrated into such superstructures, that is, under the authority and safeguard of a

²²Kreider and McClung, 73.

²³The Adventist Simple Church Network strives to provide one Fusion Gathering per quarter. One of these is the local conference campmeeting. Adventist house churches need to be connected and sense they are part of a world movement. Other factors which aid in accomplishing this include: Union and Conference papers, Adventist Review, Focus on Missions, etc. The remaining fusion gatherings tend to follow a retreat setting such as www.Restoration-International.org. In addition to the formal Fusion Gatherings, two or three house churches occasionally gather at local parks for a day of fellowship, worship, and renewal of friendships. These gatherings typically follow house church birth lines, meaning mother church and daughter churches.

²⁴Payne, 64.

local church or major denomination.”²⁵ This may be true. Given a denomination’s general tendency to maintain and control, there would need to be a trusting relationship between the denominational administrators and house-church leadership, such that their partnership would allow each to pursue Kingdom growth, given their different paradigms.²⁶

House Church Leadership Accountability: Denominational connectedness brings higher levels of accountability and potentially a stability that might not exist in some networks, and most likely does not exist in house churches that are not connected to any network.²⁷

House Church Leaders: When it comes to those who lead the house churches, as well as those who go on to establish house church networks, Payne says, “These leaders led primarily out of a *relational* authority granted to them from the churches, rather than leading from a *positional* authority because they had a certain title.”²⁸ These leaders demonstrate the heart of God for reaching unchurched people with Christ’s love. Not only do they evidence leadership characteristics, but they have high levels of faith, and deeply care about what is going on in the lives of people. This is supported by Payne, “I was surprised that 67 percent of the leaders surveyed attributed personal relationships as

²⁵Gehring, 305.

²⁶The development of this kind of trusting relationship has been this author’s experience with the Florida Conference of Seventh-day Adventist administration.

²⁷Simple Church requires monthly CORE4 meetings for the purpose of accountability, problem solving, fellowship, mission and vision refocusing.

²⁸Payne, 61.

the primary means by which their churches were reaching people with the gospel.”²⁹

²⁹Ibid., 79.

APPENDIX H

GEORGIA-CUMBERLAND HOUSE CHURCH MODEL

Through the leadership of Elder Bill Levin, the Georgia-Cumberland Conference, GCC, has pioneered house churches in Seventh-day Adventist churches of North America.

GCC's document, "Research and Planning Report Regarding Implementation of the House Church Concept in the Georgia-Cumberland Conference," May 10, 2004, covers a number of items in their model. Most pertinent is the chapter called Organizational Structure for House Churches.³⁰

Integrating House Church Structure into GCC Structure

1. Pre-House Church³¹ = "Group"
2. House Church³² = "Mission Group"

³⁰Research and Planning Report Regarding Implementation of the House Church Concept in the Georgia-Cumberland Conference, May 10, 2004, 5-8, 14-15. Although this unpublished document was developed by the Department of Pastoral Ministries and Evangelism, it is likely that Elder Bill Levin, Associate Director of Evangelism, was a major contributor. GCC uses Neil Cole's *Greenhouse* material and workbook for training purposes. For more information on *Greenhouse* visit, <http://www.cmresources.org/greenhouse/happenings>.

³¹A precursor to the house church; a formative group that is seeking to organize as a house church. A pre-house church holds no official Conference standing. Georgia-Cumberland Conference requires a signed application to establish a house church. They also require a signed House Church Covenant.

³²A group of 8-15 SDA members and interests who meet in a home for Bible study and Sabbath worship, and plan intentional evangelistic outreach in their local community with the purpose of forming new house churches. An initial house church is organized in the Conference as a mission group. House churches are lay-led.

3. Cluster³³ = “Company”
4. Network³⁴ = “Church”
5. District³⁵ = “District”

Leadership Structure for the House Church

1. Pre-House Church
2. House Church
 - a. Elder³⁶
 - b. Deacon(ess)³⁷
3. Cluster/Network

³³Two or more house churches that have collectively grown to at least 30 baptized members and have an annual tithe income of at least \$20,000. A Cluster is organized in the Conference as a company. Clusters are lay-led.

³⁴Two or more house churches that have collectively grown to at least 60 baptized members and have an annual tithe income of at least \$50,000. A network is organized in the Conference as a church. Networks are lay-led. Sociological principles indicate that a network will normally max at about 150 people.

³⁵Two or more networks that are ministered to by a Georgia-Cumberland Conference Representative. This is similar to a district composed of traditional churches led by a pastor.

³⁶A person of spiritual maturity and wisdom, chosen by the house church, who helps shepherd the house church, brings stability to the group, and encourages the house church members to discover their spiritual gifts and to use them in the work of reaching souls for the Lord. The elder also assists the house church in maintaining a global connection with the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church.

³⁷A person, chosen by the house church, who facilitates the work of the cluster/network treasurer and clerk at the house church level. This person counts the funds collected on Sabbath morning and passes them on to the treasurer. He/she also makes sure the clerk has all necessary information concerning new members.

- a. Administrator³⁸
 - b. Clerk³⁹
 - c. Treasurer⁴⁰
 - d. Communications Leader⁴¹
4. District⁴²
- a. Conference Representative⁴³

A number of house churches, house-church networks' characteristics, and two denominational house-church models have been observed. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list. But these observations help provide a wider perspective on the

³⁸The chair of the leadership team for the network/cluster. This person works closely with the GC Conference Representative who leads the district to which his/her cluster/network belongs.

The Cluster/Network Leadership Team is composed of the Administrator (chair), Communication Leader, Clerk, and Treasurer, all of whom are chosen by the house churches that they serve. Among their duties would be responsibilities to organize and facilitate the monthly joint worship service for all the house churches in the cluster/network, and facilitate reporting to the Conference.

³⁹Serves on the leadership team of the cluster/network to record and report baptisms and transfers of membership, and to perform the duties of a church clerk. The clerk serves all the house churches within its cluster/network.

⁴⁰Serves on the leadership team of the cluster/network to receive, record, report, and properly disburse all funds for the house churches within the cluster/network. The treasurer performs all the normal duties of a church treasurer.

⁴¹Serves on the leadership team of the cluster/network to facilitate clear two-way communication among house churches and the Conference.

⁴²Two or more networks that are ministered to by a Georgia-Cumberland Conference representative. This is similar to a district composed of traditional churches led by a pastor.

⁴³A paid employee of the Conference who leads and oversees a district. His/her duties focus primarily on spiritual leadership and organizational support for the district.

diversification of both house churches, house-church networks and models that exist in North America. It is not accurate to assume that a house-church network is a house-church movement.

APPENDIX I

THE TEN COMMON FACTORS⁴⁴

1. Worship in the heart language

There are cases in which God's Word has not yet been translated into the heart language of the people and worship is conducted in a trade language. Even in those rare instances, though, the heart language of the people emerges in their prayers, songs, sermon illustrations and applications. Worship in the common heart language keeps it accessible and within reach of all members of the community and allows everyone to participate in a new church's formation. Missionaries who identify and embrace the heart language of the people they are trying to reach are well positioned to stimulate a Church Planting Movement. Nothing reveals a people group's worldview as much as an intimate knowledge of their heart language. Missionaries who choose to work through a trade language begin their ministry with a curtain between themselves and the hearts of the people they are seeking to reach.

2. Evangelism has communal implications

Unlike the predominant pattern in the West with its emphasis on individualism and personal commitment, Church Planting Movements typically rely on a much stronger family and social connection. Missionaries in CPM have recognized this, and urged new believers to follow the web of their own family relationships to draw new believers into the community of faith (see Acts 16:31-32). In many cases, the churches come to consist of family units and are led by the family's head.

⁴⁴David Garrison, "Church Planting Movements," 37-40.
<http://churchplantingmovements.com/download.php> (accessed February 4, 2009).

3. Rapid incorporation of new converts into the life and ministry of the church

In most Church Planting Movements, baptism is not delayed by lengthy discipleship requirements. On the contrary, discipleship typically precedes conversion and continues indefinitely. Even when baptisms are delayed, new believers are expected to become witnesses immediately; these new disciples immediately become disciplers of others and even church planters. One elderly man who came to Christ in a Church Planting Movement in India planted 42 churches in his first year as a believer. In an effort to keep the movement growing outward, CPM-oriented missionaries typically encourage new believers to join or help start new churches, rather than simply adding larger numbers to existing congregations.

4. Passion and fearlessness

Church planting movements are characterized by passion and a sense of urgency that attests to the importance of salvation and the necessity of conversion. New believers exhibit a boldness in the face of opposition. A spirit of timidity or fear quenches a CPM. Boldness may invite persecution, but it fuels a Church Planting Movement (see Joshua 1:6).

5. A price to pay to become a Christian

Church Planting Movements often emerge in difficult settings where conversion to the gospel of Jesus Christ is not a popular or socially advantageous thing to do. In many cases, conversion leads to severe persecution or even death. In the face of this persecution, believers find strong support in the testimony of Jesus and the New Testament church (see Matt 10:17-25). Persecution tends to screen out the uncommitted and ensures a highly dedicated membership.

6. Perceived leadership crisis or spiritual vacuum in society

A country or people group that has experienced a loss of leadership or a spiritual void coming from war, natural disaster or displacement may create a ripe environment for a Church Planting Movement. Societal disintegration is becoming increasingly common in our rapidly changing world and bodes well for Church Planting Movements. The removal of long-held symbols of stability and security prompts individuals to reconsider matters of eternal significance.

7. On-the-job training for church leadership

With the rapid increase in the number of churches, effective leadership training is critical to the success of the movement. If new church leaders have to leave their churches for extended periods for theological training, the momentum of the movement will be diminished. At the same time, this vital component of church growth must not be overlooked. The most beneficial training brings education as close to the action as possible. Theological Education by Extension, with an emphasis on practical learning interspersed with ongoing ministry, has proven to be a strong complement to Church Planting Movements.

The forms of this on-the-job training vary from field to field, but typically include a series of short-term training modules that do not impede the primary tasks of evangelism, church planting and pastoral leadership. Missionaries also attest to the importance of ongoing leadership training for the continued growth and strong development of a Church Planting Movement.

8. Leadership authority is decentralized

Denominations and church structures that impose a hierarchy of authority or

require bureaucratic decision-making are ill-suited to handle the dynamism of a Church Planting Movement. It is important that every cell or house church leader has all the authority required to do whatever needs to be done in terms of evangelism, ministry and new church planting without seeking approval from a church hierarchy.

9. Outsiders keep a low profile

Missionaries who have been involved in Church Planting Movements point to the importance of keeping a low personal profile as they seek to initiate and nurture the movement. A key concern is to minimize foreignness and encourage indigeneity. Rather than waiting for new believers to prove themselves worthy of leadership, missionaries begin by drawing new believers into leadership roles through participative Bible studies and mentoring pastors from behind the scenes.

10. Missionaries suffer

A list of missionaries who have been engaged in Church Planting Movements reads like a catalog of calamity. Many have suffered illness, derision, and shame. In some instances the suffering was due to their own self-destructive behavior; in other cases it came at the hands of opponents. Students of Church Planting Movements suggest that the affliction may be related to a higher spiritual price required for rolling back the darkness (Rev 12:12). Whatever the cause, the disproportionate degree of suffering by missionaries engaged in Church Planting Movements is noteworthy. Missionaries intent on this course of action are well-advised to be on their guard, to watch, fight, and pray.

APPENDIX J

CELL CHURCH AND HOUSE CHURCH CHARACTERISTICS

Holistic Small Group (SG) Models				Other SG Models		House Church Simple Church Network
Characteristics	5x5	G12	Growth Groups	Cell Church	Free Market	LTG
Relational Bib. Study	yes	yes	yes	yes	maybe	no
Freedom to Share	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Service, In/Outward	yes	yes	yes	yes	maybe	yes
Leadership Dev.	yes	yes	yes	yes	maybe	informal
Multiplication Process	yes	yes	yes	yes	maybe	yes
Defining Characteristics	Jethro Organizational Structure	Everyone is a leader in training	Grows out of the Seventh-day Adventist mission	First model to emphasize the people are the church	Interest/hobby centered	2 – 4 people
Leadership	Leader/Assist. Leader	Co-Leaders	Co-Leaders	Leader/Assist. Leader	Usually one leader	no "leader"
Training	One day training	One day training	One day online training	Multiple days over weeks	High maintenance for church staff	Very high accountability
Multiplication	When assistant leader is ready	When someone is willing	When someone is willing	When assist. is ready	no intentional	When a CORE4 is added
Miscellaneous	World's largest church uses this model	Grew from a desire to find a way for faster multiplication than 5x5	Recommended by the North American Division	Taught at Andrews University	Uses a verity of interests/hobbies to build friendships	Specific set of accountability questions
Strengths	Systematic	Fast leader development	Developed within the Adventist context	Better cell group & cell church service integration than other models	Good job of connecting with secular people	Small typically grows faster
Weaknesses	Slow Leader Dev	Not as systematic	Viewed as optional and extra in a Constantian church model	Requires a lot of training to understand	Does not build longterm trust	Questions can be intimidating
	Slow multiplication	Feels "loose"	Feels "loose"	Limited receptivity in Adventism	No long term commitment	Often used in conjunction with house churches
Resources & Training	www.SerendipityHouse.com	Groups of 12 by Joel Comiskey	www.GrowthGroups.us	www.touchusa.org	Dog Training, Fly Fishing, And Sharing Christ in The 21st Century	
						Search & Rescue by Neil Cole
						www.SimpleChurchAtHome.com

APPENDIX K

FISHING PARABLE

It came to pass that a group existed who called themselves fishermen, and lo, there were many fish in the waters all around them. In fact, the whole area was surrounded by streams and lakes filled with hungry fish.

Week after week and month after month those who called themselves fishermen met in meetings and discussed their 'call' to fish, the abundance of fish, and how they may go about fishing. Year after year they carefully defined what fishing means, defended fishing as an occupation and declared that fishing should always be the mission-vision statement and primary task of fishermen.

Continually they searched for new and better methods of fishing and for innovative definitions for fishing. Further, they said, "The fishing industry exists for fishing as fire exists for burning." They loved slogans such as,

"Every fisherman is a fisher," and "A fisherman's outpost for every fishermen's club". They sponsored special meetings called "Fishermen's campaigns," and "The month for fishermen to fish." They subsidized global congresses where there were keynote addresses on the rationale and best practices in fishing. They promoted new fishing equipment and called for papers to be presented on innovation and new baits for fishing.

These fishermen built large, beautiful buildings called "fishermen's headquarters." The plea was that everyone should be a fisherman and every fisherman should fish. One thing they didn't do, however, was fish!

In addition to meeting regularly, they formed a board to organize and send out fishermen to other places where there were many fish. All the fishermen agreed that what was really needed was a supportive board that would challenge fishermen to be faithful. The board was formed of those who, with great courage and motivation, could do vision-casting for fishing. They spoke of the need to fish in faraway streams and lakes where many fish of different colors lived. Furthermore, the board hired staff and appointed committees and sub-committees to defend fishing and look into current trends and issues in fishing, but the staff and committee members did not fish.

Large elaborate and expensive training centers were built whose origin and primary purpose was to teach fishermen how to fish. Over the years specialized courses were offered on the existential needs and intricate nature of fish, the psychological reactions of fish, where to find fish, and how to approach and feed fish. Those who taught had PhDs (doctorates) in fishology and became professors and heads of fishology in universities. But the teachers did not fish; they only taught fishing. Year after year, after tedious training, many were graduated and given fishing licenses.

They were sent to do full time fishing, some to distant and exotic waters that were filled with fish.

Some spent much time, money and travel to do research on the history of fishing and see the faraway places where the founding fathers did great fishing in centuries past. They lauded the faithful fishermen of bygone years who handed down the idea of fishing.

Further, the fishermen established large printing houses to publish fishing guides. Presses were kept busy day and night to produce material solely devoted to fishing methods, equipment and programs to arrange and to encourage meetings to talk about fishing. A speaker's bureau was also provided to schedule special speakers on the subject of fishing.

Many who felt the call to be fishermen responded. They were commissioned and sent to fish. But like the fishermen back home, they engaged in all kinds of other occupations. They built power plants to pump water for fish and bought tractors to plow new waterways. They made all kinds of equipment to travel here and there to look at fish hatcheries. Some said that they wanted to be a part of a fishing party, but they felt they were called to furnish fishing equipment. Others felt their job was to relate to the fish in a good way so that the fish would know the difference between good and bad fishermen. Still others felt that letting the fish know they were nice land-loving neighbors was enough.

After one stirring meeting on "The Necessity of Fishing," one young fellow left the meeting and went fishing. The next day he reported that he had caught two outstanding fish. He was immediately honored for his excellent catch and scheduled to visit all the big meetings possible to tell how he did it. So he quit his fishing in order to have time to tell about the experience to the other fishermen. He was also placed on the Fishermen's General Board of Directors as a person having considerable practical experience.

Now, it is true that the fishermen sacrificed and put up with all kinds of difficulties. Some lived near the water and bore the smell of dead fish everyday. They received the ridicule of some who made fun of their fishermen's club and the fact that they claimed to be fishermen and yet never fished. They wondered about those who felt it was of little use to attend the weekly meetings to talk about fishing. After all, were they not following the master who said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men"?

Imagine how hurt some were when one day one person suggested that those who don't catch fish were really not fishermen, no matter how much they claimed to be. Yet it did sound correct. Is a person a fisherman if year after year he never catches a

fish? Is one following if he is not fishing?⁴⁵

⁴⁵A version of this story credited to J. Drescher, *Pulpit Digest*, July-Aug, 1978.
<http://chrisgnanakan.wordpress.com/2008/04/03/a-plea-for-fishing-evangelism/> (accessed February 16, 2008).

APPENDIX L

SATAN'S MEETING

Satan called a worldwide convention of demons. In his opening address he said, "We can't keep Christians from going to church. We can't keep them from reading their Bibles and knowing the truth. We can't even keep them from forming an intimate relationship with their Savior. Once they gain that connection with Jesus, our power over them is broken. So let them go to their churches. Let them have their covered dish dinners, BUT, steal their time so they don't have time to develop a relationship with Jesus Christ. This is what I want you to do," said the devil. "Distract them from gaining hold of their Savior and maintaining that vital connection throughout their day!"

"How shall we do that?" his demons shouted.

"Keep them busy in the nonessentials of life and invent innumerable schemes to occupy their minds," he answered. "Tempt them to spend, spend, spend and borrow, borrow, borrow. Persuade the wives to go to work for long hours and the husbands to work six to seven days each week, 10 to 12 hours a day, so they can afford their empty lifestyles. Keep them from spending time with their children. As their families fragment, soon their homes will offer no escape from the pressures of work!

"Overstimulate their minds so that they cannot hear that still, small voice. Entice them to play the radio or cassette or CD whenever they drive. Keep the TV, VCR, CD, DVD and their PC going constantly in their home; and see to it that every store and restaurant in the world plays non-biblical music constantly. This will jam their minds and break that union with Christ. Fill the coffee tables with magazines and newspapers. Pound their minds with the news 24 hours a day. Invade their driving moments with billboards. Flood their mailboxes with junk mail, mail order catalogs, sweepstakes, guaranteed credit cards and every kind of newsletter and promotion, offering free products, services and false hopes.

"Keep skinny, beautiful models on the magazines and TV, so husbands will believe that outward beauty is what's important and they will become dissatisfied with their wives. Keep those skinny, beautiful models on the magazines to grab the attention of their young sons at a very early age. Keep the wives too tired to love their husbands at night, and the husbands too self-involved to show the wives any love and appreciation. If they don't, they will all begin to look elsewhere. That will fragment their families quickly.

"Give them Santa Claus to distract them from teaching their children the real meaning of Christmas. Give them an Easter bunny so they won't talk about Jesus' resurrection and power over sin and death.

“Even in their recreation, let them be excessive. Have them return from their vacations exhausted. Keep them too busy to go out in nature and reflect on God’s creation. Send them to amusement parks, sporting events, plays, concerts and movies instead. Keep them busy, busy, busy.

“And when they do meet for spiritual fellowship, involve them in gossip and small talk so they will leave with troubled consciences. Crowd their lives with so many good causes they will have no time to seek power from Jesus. Soon they will be working in their own strength, sacrificing their health and family for the good of the cause.”

“It will work! It will work!” the demons screamed.

The demons went eagerly to their assignments causing Christians everywhere to get busier and more rushed, going here and there, having little time for their God or their families, and having no time to tell others about the power of Jesus to change lives.

I guess the question is, “Has the devil been successful in his schemes?” You be the judge!!⁴⁶

⁴⁶With a simple Google search, this parable can be found a number of places on the internet.

APPENDIX M

SHARED MINISTRY VISION

When one completes Phase One training they are given
www[dot]Starting[dot]SimpleChurchAtHome[dot]com⁴⁷ which takes them through the
Shared Ministry Vison and launches them into Phase Two training.

⁴⁷The [dot] is intentional as it will not allow this address to be as easily identified
in web search engines.

APPENDIX N

CORE4 RESPONSIBILITIES

See the Simple Church Network Guidelines for the most recent job description.

This is part of Phase Two training.

APPENDIX O

KEEPING THE “SIMPLE” IN SIMPLE CHURCH FINANCES

- Let’s begin with the end in mind. What would we do if there was no money to spend?
- Let’s be creative. How could we figure this out without spending money?
- Let’s be honest. Is the money directly going to help people and/or relieve suffering in their lives?
- Let’s invest in people, not assets. We say, Yes to consumable supplies, No to “asset” and “inventory” items
- Let’s keep this simple. There are two donation options: tithe and offerings.
- Let’s clarify. Please do not try to “use/abuse” Simple Church to get a tax break and still control “your” money. Once given, the offering is not yours.
- Let’s focus. Our goals - less than 10 percent of our total financial income (tithe and offerings) goes toward administrative/overhead expenses, more than 90 percent is to be directly invested in people.
- Let’s remember, each Simple Church needs to carry the financial responsibility for their own location.

APPENDIX P
SABBATH FLOW

The House

Our home is no longer our home. Yes, there are ground rules which are articulated on the child safety post and one bedroom that is off limits. The rest of our 1,500 square foot home is everyone's home. See the appendix for pictures.

Midweek, my wife fires up the crock pot to get the beans ready for the traditional Mexican Hay Stack lunch. Friday afternoon is a family cleaning time. Our three children, ages ten, eight, and five, all have chores. Keep in mind that over the past eight months we have drastically simplified our home. We came to the place where we had to realize that people are more important than our materialistic belongings. People who have accepted Christ will go to heaven; everything else will burn.

The Day

Simple Church is a missional way of life. We want everyone who visits our home to observe and appreciate this way of life. We also wanted to redesign Sabbath so that it was the highlight of our children's week. For example, we do not have a television in our home. This is very intentional. Most people who do not have televisions will argue "poor values." I argue "appetite training." No matter how "good" the program, even "Christian" television trains an appetite that makes it much harder for Sabbath School teachers to "compete." This decision is also in line with our goals of simplifying life, re-prioritizing life, and creating an environment that helps cultivate a deeper walk with God. In other words, what happens in a home is as important as what does not happen in a home for setting the stage for Sabbath to be the highlight.

Breakfast is served 7:30 a.m. This will be one of four meals that will happen on Sabbath. Children love it.

As a family we watch nature videos on a computer screen at 8:30 a.m. since we do not have a TV. Another principal, besides training appetite, is who chooses what is watched and why do we watch? To say it another way, the issue is not the TV screen, the movie screen, or the computer screen. To say, “stay away from the TV” will repeat what happened among some Adventists in past years when people were taught, stay out of the movie theater. That worked well until VCR, DVD, TV’s, and internet became part of peoples lives. To summarize this sensitive topic, training appetite and teaching principles must be foundational.

DVD’s like Janice’s Attic and Planet Earth have been longtime favorites. The goal is to make Sabbath the highlight and a day to spend with family, others, and with God. Janice’s Attic and Planet Earth would be considered “boring” if television or Christian television had trained the appetite during the week.⁴⁸

At 9:30 am last minute preparations are completed. Seating is arranged in a circle with extra seating close at hand. In our master bedroom, which is mostly set up for

⁴⁸In August 1999, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) issued guidelines recommending that children under the age of 2 watch no television or screen entertainment at all. For children over the age of 2 parents need to exert caution, such as setting limits on TV viewing, helping children develop media literacy skills to question, analyze, and evaluate TV messages, and taking an active role in their children’s TV viewing. The AAP also recommends children of all ages should never have a television in their bedroom due to televisions’s ability to negatively affect early brain development.

Such studies as the one led by pediatric researcher, Dimitri Christakis, MD, MPH, at the Seattle Children’s Hospital, have revealed that each hour of television watched per day at ages 1-3 increases the risk of attention problems, such as ADHD, by almost 10 percent at age 7, despite the content of the television programs. Dimitri Christakis, “Early Television Exposure and Subsequent Attentional Problems in Children,” *Pediatrics*, 2004.

children's activities, we actually flip the bed up against the wall to make more space. The table is set for brunch. The Basic10⁴⁹ are put in place.

At 10:00 a.m. or shortly after, we have a prayer with those who are present, asking God to bless the food, our time together, and that He would soften peoples' hearts.

From 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. is mixing and mingling time over brunch. Brunch is provided by the Host Coordinator and is a reimbursable item, if they choose. Simple Church models and encourages simple healthy food: toast, natural peanut butter, honey, non-sugar jams, nuts, fruit, pure juice, etc. We believe that one's ability to discern spiritual things is directly connected to the food we eat.

Around 11:00 a.m. begins with Check-In, followed by God Moments. As with brunch, everyone voluntarily participates in Check-In.

Check-In asks three questions. One of the CORE4 answers first to provide a model, then Simple Church goes around the circle; children and adults all have a time to share. The three questions include: (1) What is your first name? (2) What was your week like? and (3) one of the rotation questions is selected each week: How are you simplifying your life? How are you re-prioritizing your life? Or, how are you trying to cultivate a deeper walk with God?

These three accountability questions accomplish their purpose. People voluntarily share amazing things⁵⁰ that empower them to connect with God, connect with each other,

⁴⁹Oatmeal Can, Connection Card envelopes, Post card invitation cards, Taco Salad sign-up sheet, extra New Living Translation Bibles, LTG Bookmarks, Group Agreement, Child Safety Poster (to post), Blessing List, and the Link to online Simple Church Weekly Report form (This is the Details Coordinator's responsibility to fill out).

⁵⁰In our group alone, people have emptied "two rooms of clutter." Two families have turned off cable TV. One family is getting rid of their TV. Multiple people talk

and have time to serve our world. “Christ’s method alone will bring true success.”

Mingling takes time, ministering to people takes time so you can know what their needs are. Sympathizing assumes a relational and time involvement. Winning confidence requires a long-term investment in people with a no-strings-attached service mindset. Then we pray and wait for the right time to bid them to take one more step toward Jesus.

Check-In for children uses questions like, “What was the best part of your week?” And, “How did you help somebody this week?”

After Check-In, which usually takes thirty minutes, the children go to their activities which will last from 11:45 to 1:00 p.m.

Check-In is followed by God Moments, which is a time when the adults share a variety of God experiences. It may be a Bible promise, a prayer request, a song, where they saw God working, how God used them, answered prayer, etc. This is a time when we stop and pray for specific shared needs or prayer requests.

Approximately 12:00 noon is when the Kick-Off question is asked, which is followed by a relational Bible study. I say “ish” because although there is a flow to Simple Church gatherings, Jesus is the leader, and we try to sense where and how He is leading us while we gather together.

It is said in some house church literature that the house church exists for the believers. Gehring references a number of other scholars and gives emphasis with italics:

The Gospel was first proclaimed in the publicly acceptable places. Subsequently, those who had responded were drawn into house gatherings. *Luke never even suggests that during these private meetings of believers the Gospel message was preached for the purpose of converting the hearers.* On the contrary, for Luke these

about their new priorities of quiet time with Jesus, time with family and time to “waste” with unchurched friends and neighbors.

private house meetings were for the benefit of the Christian community alone.⁵¹

This does not mean house churches were not missional. Two hundred pages later Gehring continues, “Houses served also as missional bases of operation. They provided the mission with co-laborers for outreach in the city and surrounding area.”⁵²

Kreider and McClung will argue a different perspective when they say,

The two *primary* focuses of healthy house churches are outreach and discipleship, rather than fellowship alone. This is because the biblical focus of the Church is outreach and discipleship. Great fellowship *is* a healthy by-product of the house church that consistently reaches out to others – but it cannot be the goal if you want your house church to fully please God.⁵³

This apparent tension is relieved in Jesus’ prayer found in John 17:4. “I brought glory to you here on earth by doing everything you told me to do.” Yes, we were created to bring honor and glory to God. And yes, we do that like Jesus did, by doing the work He has asked us to do.

Worship is God-focused. He is our audience. We are not the audience, but we benefit from the fellowship that comes from gathering together and recounting the great and mighty acts of God we have seen and/or experienced in our lives. This builds up the body of Christ, and causes unbelievers who are in our midst to take note that we have been with God.

Sometimes the Kick-Off question goes around the circle and sometimes people voluntarily answer. This Kick-Off question is designed to lay the groundwork for the opening of Bibles.

⁵¹Gehring, 15-16.

⁵²Ibid., 227.

⁵³Kreider and McClung, 28.

Relational Bible study begins with someone reading the Bible story in a modern translation. Simple Church avoids going around the circle having everyone reading one or two verses. The Bible story can end up sounding really odd.

Relational Bible study used two groups of questions: (1) Listening & Learning Questions, sometimes called Dig Questions, and (2) Heart & Healing Questions, sometimes called Heart Questions. One of the more important things to remember is that each group of questions is given equal time. Fifty percent of the study time is for Listening and Learning; fifty percent is for Heart and Healing. Adventist like to spend most of their time on Learning and will, early on, tend to avoid Heart and Healing questions.

Simple Church Leader Guides are available online, <http://www.BibleStudies.SimpleChurchAtHome.com>

Simple Church closes using a variety of closures taught in the online Growth Groups training.

About 1:30 p.m. lunch is served. Children and adults come together for prayer, which is preceded by any announcements, birthday singing, and a reminder to sign up to bring something for next week's Mexican Hay Stack and help clean up before leaving for the day.

By 3:30 p.m. most people have left our home. However, people have stayed at our home as late as 10:00 p.m.

APPENDIX Q

CHILDREN IN SIMPLE CHURCH

Keep in mind, approximately seventy-five percent of the children come from unchurched and broken families, public school, and have been raised in front of a TV. This all adds up to lots of hard work. The “simple” in Simple Church does not mean it is an “easy” church. These children are not used to sitting still in a nice and neat row of chairs and raising their hands when they want to speak. According to Tony and Felicity Dale, “including kids in a portion of their house-church gatherings is chaotic but worth it.”⁵⁴ Simple Church resonates with this, and Brenda has said it sometimes feels like, “organized chaos.” Yet these children love Simple Church, and their parents tell us they talk about it and look forward to it all week long.

As already noted, children are part of the family. During the five- to six-hour Simple Church Sabbath experience, children and adults are together approximately eighty percent (three and one-half hours) of the time. This includes the entire experience: eating, socializing, activities, God Moments, etc. For twenty percent of the time they are given the opportunity to relate to one another on their own level (one hour to one and one-half hours).⁵⁵

Three items, although there are others, contribute to the children’s love of Simple Church: (1) food, (2) a trampoline, and (3) knowing that they are deeply loved by the teachers. This love goes beyond “I love you, but I can’t wait until Sabbath School is over.” It is a family day where children interact, pray, listen, sing, and share with adults.

⁵⁴Kreider and McClung, 114.

⁵⁵Ibid., 210; Simson, 97; Garrison, 48.

Children's Curriculum

Brenda uses a variety of resources, but Grace Links⁵⁶ forms the foundation. In the past we tried sending home their weekly papers but have abandoned that for now as we realized these materials were not being used. For Simple Churches who want to send home a weekly paper with each child, they must order them using an "individual subscription" ordering style. This is to say, the Adventist presses are only capable of sending all standing orders to one Simple Church address which is where the billing information is sent. So, our work-around has been the "individual subscription." Janet Hass, 407 644-4255, handles all the annual subscriptions for Sabbath School materials.

In line with Simple Church's goals of keeping things simple, all children's Sabbath School teacher guides/helps/activities are downloaded directly from Grace Link's web page.

Other resources have included (1) Kids Zone, and (2) Truth 4 Youth.

Kids Zone was used to take all the children through the basic Bible teachings of the Adventist church, but the actual Kids Zone lessons were not handed out. Brenda creatively and age-appropriately taught each topic by pulling together needed activities and stories. The week they talked about baptism, all the children were given the opportunity to prepare for baptism. Those who responded to this invitation were given the first Kids Zone lesson to complete at home with their parents. Brenda works with parents, so they take the formal responsibility of helping their children prepare for baptism, even if the parents are not Christians, in which case Brenda also gives the

⁵⁶<http://www.gracelink.net/>

parent(s) their own copy of Kids Zone.

Brenda is planning to use Truth 4 Youth, both as a base with the children and then as an evangelistic series for children and by children. This has not yet been completed but is being compiled.

APPENDIX R

SIMPLE CHURCH AND GROWTH GROUP LOGOS

www.SimpleChurchAtHome.com, www.GrowthGroups.us,

www.SimpleChurchInfo.com



APPENDIX S

RELATIONAL BIBLE STUDY GUIDES

Visit <http://www.SimpleChurchAtHome.com> then click on the downloads link for complete guides.

APPENDIX T

SIMPLE CHURCH STATICAL SUMMARY

JUNE 1, 2008 – MARCH 31, 2009

<h2 style="text-align: center;">Simple Church Overview</h2> <p style="text-align: center;">a Seventh-day Adventist House Church Network. April 10, 2009</p>			
	Inception AVERAGES	2008, 1/2 Year AVERAGES	2009 AVERAGES for 3 groups
Attendance per Location	20.66%	16.68%	27.26%
Total	24	29	20
Children	11	12	9
Adults	14	17	10
Family Units	9	11	7
unChurched* Adult Guests	29.77%	34.71%	28.76%
1st Time Returning	1 3	1 5	1 2
			68.18% of unChurched guests return.
Churched* Adult Guests	21.41%	16.88%	28.93%
1st Time Returning	2 1	2 1	2 1
			37.39% of churched guests return.
CORE4* in Training	5	14	3
			* CORE4 are counted as "CORE4 in training" when they have turned in the Simple Church Annual Commitment Form.
New Simple Church Plants	3	1	2
Baptisms*	6	6	0
			* When baptized a person automatically become a "CORE4 in training". Discipleship is a way of life for Simple Church
Finances*	Since Inception TOTALS	1/2 Year 2008 TOTALS	Year To Date TOTALS
Tithe Offering	\$31,522.31	\$17,056.36	\$14,465.95
Children's Offering	\$15,967.48	\$8,604.94	\$7,362.54
	\$376.96	\$206.28	\$170.68
			* 96% of our finances go to help and serve others. Only 4% is used to maintain Simple Church. Compared to all North American churches in 2003 where 96% of their financial resources were spend on serving and maintaining themselves.

APPENDIX U
HOUSE CHURCH WEB PAGES

www.apexchurch.org

www.associationofhomechurches.com

www.churchstartingnetwork.com

www.dcfi.org

www.disciplethenations.org

www.easumbandy.com

www.hccentral.com

www.hcna.us

www.house2house.tv

www.house-church.org

www.housechurch.ca

www.housechurch.org

www.housechurchresource.org

www.imb.org/CPM/

www.koinonia.org

www.newchurchlife.com

www.oikosministries.com

www.ptmin.org

www.simplechurchathome.com

www.simplechurchinfo.com

www.simplechurchjournal.com

www.simplychurch.com

www.therockcc.us

www.vineyardcentral.com

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